

The Golden Apple Tree



Virna Sheard

Norquay School
Div. 6 Grade 5

~~Miss M. Riby~~
Miss M. E. Brown.



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The Golden Apple Tree



"Then I implore you, give me the moonstones," she requested softly.

The Golden Apple Tree

By
Virna Sheard

Illustrated by
Norman Price

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“To all young hearts”

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The Golden Apple Tree

THE GOLDEN APPLE TREE

THIS story happened a long time ago in the country where anything may happen. The people who belong to that country stay there, and nothing can induce them to journey beyond its borders.

Also, very few travelers find their way in, because the road that runs that way is hidden in a rosy mist.

This mist-road winds around and around a ring of mountains that are dreadfully hard to find on the map—and sometimes are not on the map at all.

You need not read this first part unless you like. It is only a preface, and usually people skip them. The story begins here.

.
The King's Highway that ran east and west through the City of Midas was a wonderful highway. The buildings fronting upon it, the houses, shops, palaces and churches, had all been colored a brilliant golden hue, and the cupolas, spires, turrets and domes topping the buildings were tipped and touched with gold-leaf.

The road was flagged with stones of deepest yellow, and the whole street was so radiant and re-

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splendent that the citizens often wore smoked glasses when they walked abroad at noon-day.

Upon a great topaz fastened against the door of the City Hall and Court House, was engraved the legend of King Midas of the golden touch, he who had founded the city and made it his home. To the legend was added a brief note telling that the city fathers had thought it wise to color the buildings yellow, in memory of the bewitchment that had years ago come upon the avaricious King, and the miracle of his deliverance from it.

This was a warning to all and sundry to beware of covetousness and greed and the evils in their wake.

Small heed did the good people pay to the words graven on the topaz, and long and loudly they grumbled at the taxes put upon them, for it cost much money to paint and polish and gold-leaf the buildings on the wonderful road.

In their heart of hearts, probably, they took pride in the highway, for no matter how much they grumbled they paid the taxes promptly.

Now the most beautiful thing on all the beautiful highway and the most marvelous, was an apple tree.

It stood in the middle of a little square before the City Hall, and it was by far the most prized possession of the dwellers in the City of Midas—

from the oldest inhabitant, tottering on his shrunken legs to rest in its shadow, to the youngest child, tottering also, but on dimpled feet to where he could stand and wonder at its shining burden of apples.

For this apple tree was of gold, root and branch and leaf and fruit. It was the one golden fact in a place of golden frauds.

As long as anyone could remember, the tree had been there, and as long as anyone they had ever seen could remember. Musty documents filed away in musty drawers, and old, old letters and deeds-of-law with crumbling edges, referred to it casually.

Ancient wills and testaments bore ancient seals stamped with a picture of this very tree.

Generations came and went, fashions came in and went out, but the old, yet ever-young apple tree lifted its golden branches to the sky, serene and unchanged.

It was taken for granted that on that far-off day when King Midas was bewitched of the golden touch, and laid hands so energetically on every object around him, including the very trees and flowers of his garden, he had touched this apple tree also, and by strange alchemy turned it to the precious metal.

Further, it was supposed that in the King's hour

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of repentance, when he sprinkled the magic water on all the golden garden to transform it again into a place of green growing things, this tree had been forgotten or overlooked, until the water was all gone.

An occasional stranger gazed with awe at the tree of mystery and asked questions about it, but the citizens, who, for the most part were simple and unlettered, and given to seeing the pixies and warlocks and fairies that came and went in their own mountains, regarded the tree with pride but little curiosity, and as people do regard things they have always known.

A sentinel marched in front of it night and day, while to the very left of it was the Town Pillory, and to the right the Town Gallows. There was no chance visitor who had found his way along the rose-misty road and followed it into the golden city, who did not quickly learn just why the pillory and the gallows were on the right and left of the wonderful tree. He was straightway informed that any person who as much as touched a leaf with even the tip of a finger, was, without ceremony, made fast in the pillory to languish there, whatever the weather, for one full day; while that delinquent who, for wanton mischief, folly, or thievishness, broke a golden apple from its branch, was without much ado quickly hung upon the gallows.

Whether by reason of this law or because of sentiment, the tree was seldom molested, and the sentinel had but a dull existence. Apart from these simple restrictions the town-folk were free to come and go beneath the golden thing, and there was no more favored meeting-place than the grassy circle shadowed by the out-flung glittering branches. It may be temptation was lessened, as the apples and leaves hung high above the reach of any but the very longest arm.

Now, it was upon a certain July afternoon that various things happened in the City of Midas that afterwards were written down in the town chronicles, and so seem worth telling about.

The afternoon was so hot that the dazzling street was deserted. A white-haired priest crossing in front of the City Hall suddenly stopped, and then as though exhausted, sat down on a bench beneath the tree.

The sentinel on duty before it tramped slowly up and down and found time heavy on his hands. His uniform was tight and hot and of a flaming scarlet. His boots shone as though made of polished metal, while his helmet and musket felt heavy as lead.

Little waves of heat quivered up from the ground, and at intervals a locust sang its sudden song of the sun. The light glanced down through

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the golden tree until each individual leaf and apple seemed to shoot hot rays at him.

It was the sort of day when dogs go mad, and people are apt to do things unaccountable and foreign to their natures; when strong men in the fields dread a stroke from heaven, and little babies wilt like flowers left without rain.

The old priest nodded in the hot shade, and the sentinel went back and forth monotonously, all misery within, all grandeur without. He was sick of his task, sick of the heat and silence, and aimlessly wished for something to happen—for anything, indeed, to happen that might serve to distract his mind until the hour of release.

And something did happen.

Far down the golden highroad he saw a man coming towards him, swinging along at a swift dog-trot.

The sentinel stood stock-still, because there was so much that was unusual about the running figure. Also, it was strange that anyone should travel so fast in the great heat. The sentinel gazed, and wondered what method there was—if any—in this seeming midsummer madness.

On came the swinging figure down the deserted, dazzling street, and now the sentinel suddenly recognized him.

"The King's lion-tamer!" he exclaimed to the

air. "Well! By my musket, he has less sense than I thought or else is mightily pressed for time! Whatever can he want in such a hurry on such a day? In truth these strong fellows, all brawn and muscle, have small brains; but I will find out his business when he comes nearer."

On came the King's lion-tamer along the highway, as though he were the winged Mercury.

His wavy hair, thick and sun bleached until it was tawny as a lion's mane, flew out around his head. He wore a leopard skin about his body, and his great shoulders and limbs gleamed like bronze against the yellow fur. Only did it show white on his forehead where the hair blew back.

There were sandals of tanned leather on his bare feet, and above one knee was a golden garter set with topaz.

On and on he came, and his pace quickened as he reached the little grassy square before the City Hall, where stood the golden apple tree.

"Halt!" cried the sentinel as he came up, more to indicate that he was in command, than for any particular reason. But the lion-tamer gave not the slightest heed. He stopped only when he was fairly underneath the tree. Then he threw back his head, and looked up into the glittering branches, and his breath came in heavy gasps.

The sentinel watched him curiously, mouth ajar.

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The old white-haired priest woke up and leaned forward on his cane, watching also.

The lion-tamer glanced from one to the other and a little smile flashed across his face. Then he stretched an arm towards the branch above his head.

"Watch hard, my friends!" he said. "As there are no others about, I depend on you for witnesses. Behold me pluck the forbidden fruit."

The old priest rose with a sharp cry; the sentinel sprang forward with musket leveled.

"Take down your arm!" he commanded. "What would you do? He who even *touches* the tree is punished grievously, but he who *plucks* the fruit is a dead man! Take down your arm! Take it down!"

His words trailed off into a cry of horror, for the lion-tamer had sprung upon his strong young feet, caught an apple and twisted and broken it from the bough!

Then he stepped out into the sunlight and tossed the golden thing high into the air, catching it as it fell.

The sentinel's knees shook beneath him and he turned cold in his hot uniform. His whole body wilted limply for a moment, then stiffened.

"The penalty! The penalty!" he exclaimed. "Do you not know it, O rash fellow? I take you prisoner in the King's name! By my faith, it is

a thing I hate to do, for 'twill be hard to see so fine a man food for carrion crows."

The old priest had risen tremblingly to his feet, and now stood as one stricken with horror. "Why have you done this thing?" he asked, his face white and stern. "Have you any reason for this unpardonable act?"

"In sooth, good father, I have a reason," the lion-tamer answered, with still the same smile. "I desire death. This is a straight road to it, so they tell me. I have not lived long in your country, but this much the veriest stranger soon learns."

"But why would you die?" he asked. "Have you committed some sin, a sin too great to live and atone for? Nay, I cannot think that possible when I look at thy face."

The man shrugged his shoulders. "It is not for my sins I wish to die, good father," he said—"though I have sins in plenty—but by reason of a heart-ache that is too great to be borne."

"A heart-ache!" exclaimed the old priest. "Thou wouldst throw away life with all it means—thy beautiful life, now at high-tide—because of a heart-ache! Thou must be mad or very, very young. I would know what has caused thee so hard an ache as that. Come—sit down by me on the bench. The sentinel will give us grace of a scant half-hour ere he takes thee in charge."

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"Make me thy confessor. Thy time may be short when the people hear of this deed."

They took their places on the little bench and the sentinel, somewhat addle-pated from the sun and the sudden responsibility and horror of the moment, made no protest, but stood dumbly on guard.

The priest turned his face, still white and stern, to the man beside him. "If you have aught to tell me, my son," he began, "I am over-ready to listen, and to give help and consolation. Nay, more. I find it in my soul to make excuse for thy rash deed, if you give me reason. Still remember in this I speak for myself alone, not for the people."

The lion-tamer turned the golden apple around in his hand, looking at it absently.

"Wouldst really know why I desire to die? Art that much concerned regarding me, good father?"

"Of a truth—yes, my son!" answered the old man quickly.

The lion-tamer glanced up through the golden branches to the blue beyond, and then down at the priest with a sudden boyish smile, half-diffident, but wholly confiding.

"Well, then," he said slowly, "well, then, it was just by reason of bitter loneliness—and of love."

"Of love?" exclaimed the old priest. "Of *love*, dost thou say? Of loneliness it may be a man would die, but not of love, methinks."

The man nodded his tawny head in contradiction.

"Listen, good father," he said. "I come from a country far from here—a very far country. In that country my father was a noble and I his eldest son. We had much land of forest and stream and lake and meadow." His eyes grew absent and misty again, and he paused.

"Yes?" questioned the priest.

"War came into my country," he went on. "My father fought and was killed. I fought also and was taken captive. They bore me, bound, many leagues on into an unknown land, and left me in a prison whose whereabouts I do not know. I only know that as I counted time, five years went by in unspeakable solitude and silence." He paused again, and the guard stepped a little nearer to listen.

"And then?" said the old priest.

"And then I escaped. I escaped by night; and when the morning broke found myself on a road that wound around a mountain; a lovely road overhung with a rosy mist.

"This I followed, good father, and it brought me to the City of Midas."

"Oh!" nodded the holy father. "To our good city, my son?"

"Yes," he answered. "I was so glad at being free that weariness and sorrow slipped from me. I felt the joy of youth and strength again, after a few weeks' rest at an inn on the edge of the city, just within the great walls. I paid the inn-keeper and his wife for their kindness by pruning their orchard. While there I chanced to hear that the King's lion-tamer was dead and he looked for another. Now, good father, I possess a strange gift. At home they said one of the fairies had given it to me in my cradle. However that may be, I have the gift to this day. It is no less than an influence potent and strong over beasts and birds, both wild and tame. By my eyes I can hold them, by my voice I can charm them, by my touch I can lure them, and my beckoning they will follow unless they be sick or under some spell of madness. This gift I discovered when I was a little child. The animals of the forest and field were my comrades; I knew no fear of them and they no fear of me. We understood each other.

"So now I said to myself: I will go to the king and offer to take the place of the dead lion-tamer! This I did, and was accepted and made keeper and trainer of the royal beasts."

"I heard," said the priest, "there was another

younger keeper. Reports said the king's former lion-tamer had been killed by a lioness."

The guard nodded in affirmation and stepped nearer, listening.

The lion-tamer turned the golden apple in his hand. "By Jessica," he said casually. "She is still half-wild and uncertain in her moods. But to my story, good father. I have been keeper of the beasts since the winter months and have been content after a fashion until lately. Early in spring the little Princess and her ladies came to watch me train the young lions, and—and I saw the Lady Belledowin."

The priest gave a start. "The Lady Belledowin!" he exclaimed. "The court beauty! Is she again at the castle? Her mourning for the old duke, her father, has been short."

"She is at court," the man answered. "She is the first lady-in-waiting to the Princess. I saw her—and loved her, good father," he ended.

"But there is more to be told, my son?" urged the priest.

"A little more, truly," he returned. "Often after that first visit to the lions' quarters the Princess and her ladies came again to look on while I put the beasts through their play. It was for those short moments I lived. To-day in the great heat, they came again, the little Princess and the

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others; the Lady Belledowin also. I saw them coming through the trees and flowers of the garden, like a flock of bright butterflies.

"You know, perhaps, the lions' quarters? It is on the far side of the great Imperial gardens, and though artificial is like a bit of the desert. Quite wonderfully like it. There are silver-gray rocks rising out of the pink and yellow sand. The cages are almost invisible by reason of being painted like to the desert colors.

"The wall is stone, topped with open iron work, and there is a mighty gate barred on the outside, so when the beasts are safely caged the courtiers may enter the quarters. The timid are often content to look through the iron fence.

"The Lady Belledowin reached the great gate first, and I went to meet her from within the enclosure—for to-day it was not safe to enter. She already had drawn the bronze bolts when I came up, and we met in the open gateway. I trembled at sight of her beauty. In the afternoon light it was like a radiance that blinded one.

" 'It is not safe to enter the lions' quarters to-day, Lady Belledowin,' I said. 'Even my small gate at the far side is double locked and forbidden to all but the water and food-carriers. Jessica has almost wrecked her cage. The door fastenings

are loose, and I have not yet decided where to move her.'

"She laughed and threw a backward glance at the Princess and the court ladies who were coming near.

" 'Pasanello'—that is the name I bear here, good father—'Pasanello says it is dangerous to go into the enclosure,' she said. 'The locks are sprung on one of the cages, so he tells me; but I choose to think he wishes to frighten us, and belittle our courage. I am certainly going in. I desire to select, to-day, the lion-cub the king promised should be mine.'

"The little Princess ran to Lady Belledowin and caught her hand. You, perhaps, know the little Princess and her ways, good father?"

"I have seen and heard of her," answered the old man.

"She possesses the sweetest heart and kindest in all the court, 'tis said," went on the lion-tamer. "Now in most earnest fashion she coaxed Lady Belledowin to give up the thought of going near the cages. But it was useless. Had the Princess commanded she needs must have obeyed, but she would not respond to a request. With a little light and daring laugh she entered and swung the gate behind her.

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"Then she ran down the stone steps into the enclosure. It is a hundred yards to the cages, but Jessica had seen the new figure and was pacing her cage furiously.

"Lady Belledowin took no heed of the warnings. She went on toward the cage where the lion cubs were sleeping, her rose-colored gown of some light silk, fluttering about her. The cubs, good father, belong to Jessica, and were removed from her because she injured one.

"Now as the lioness saw Lady Belledowin approach them, she quivered with fresh rage; then gave a terrific roar, burst the door of her cage, and with one bound came halfway to my lady across the sand. There the great beast crouched flat, gathering force for the fatal spring. Lady Belledowin stood as though turned to snow. She neither spoke nor cried out. While one's heart has time to beat once I stood also. Then I leaped to her side.

"The lioness crouched still, and I faced her, fixing my eyes on her two blazing eyes. I could see her begin to tremble through her tense muscles. I gazed steadfastly at her, holding my Lady Belledowin back with one arm. To move would have been fatal.

"There we stood. I turned cold and my face grew wet as with rain.

"Still we stood and I suddenly felt my force over the lioness weakening. At that instant she sprang—but dropped a scant yard short of my lady.

"'Run! Run!' I cried to her. 'This is the one chance. Before she springs again! Run—and make fast the gate!'

"I heard the silken flutter of her gown as she ran, but I did not withdraw my eyes from the eyes of the lioness. She crouched again where she had alighted, baffled and maddened.

"An inch nearer I moved to her, the sweat still cold on my face.

"Backward she crept an inch. So we went, she and I gazing steadfastly. Back and back she crept, and I forward. Ever she lashed her tail softly and in her throat was a sound not good to hear,—yet she crept back.

"When her cage was reached I stood quite still and straight and spoke.

"'Enter!' I called in the voice she knew and was used to obey.

"'Enter, Jessica!'

"With drooping head she swung as on a pivot, and shrank into the cage. The muttering in her throat ended in a sort of sob, and I had conquered.

"I closed the broken door, and called to one of the cage men who now came running; with soldering iron, he made the door fast, and to-morrow

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the lioness will be transferred to a newer cage.”

There was a pause—then “To-morrow!” he said again and gave a short laugh.

“But that is not all, my son?” questioned the priest again.

“No,” Pasanello returned, “though I would it were. This follows, good father. When the lioness was made safe I went up into the garden where the little Princess and her ladies still stood in frightened silence, the Lady Belledowin in their midst. She was yet white as driven snow, and her eyes were dark and wide as with lingering horror. There seemed to me also to be anger in them—anger of a kind at herself, and at the whole incident. But she stood straight and beautiful as one whose pride still dominated. Never had she looked so beautiful.

“‘Ah, Pasanello,’ she said, with cool sweetness. ‘After all, you were right, and I wrong. It seems I owe you my life. What can I give you in token of eternal gratitude?’

“Good father, I looked at her and was dazzled as by the sun. For the moment I forgot I was not in my own country, forgot I was the King’s lion-tamer, and but a mountebank of the court. Forgot the little group of court ladies. I lifted her hand to my lips. ‘I love you!’ I said. ‘I love you! I ask no gift of life but your love.’

"My words stopped and there was a strange silence, as though the Lady Belledowin and the little Princess and the others stood quite breathless for that half moment.

"Then Lady Belledowin drew her hand from mine and struck me lightly on the cheek. Catching a bracelet from her arm, she threw it down at my feet.

" 'You are insolent!' she said in a voice low but sharp as steel.

" 'Insolent past belief. Such as you are paid in gold. They render no service that cannot be so paid. Pick up the bracelet that pays thee!'

"I stood stock still and saw it glittering on the grass. The court ladies turned and drifted away through the trees like shadows, Lady Belledowin with them.

"Still I stood, my heart pounding against my side with rage and with agony. I was as one consumed with rage and agony; one deaf and blind to everything else. There came a soft touch on my arm. I looked down and saw the Princess.

" 'Pasanello,' she said, 'you are very brave; very wonderful. The Lady Belledowin was cruel—more cruel than the lioness would have been. We will not forgive the Lady Belledowin for her manner of speaking to you. But you, Pasanello, you

need not greatly care. It is only *ourselves* can hurt *ourselves*.'

"'Good-by, Pasanello,' she said, leaving me. 'Be brave *still*, Pasanello.'

"The words came to me only as in a dream. Suddenly I bethought me of the golden apple tree. A weariness of life shook me. I would be done with loneliness and humiliation—yes—and love.

"I left the King's garden and took the highway. Perhaps I ran; I do not remember. But, good father, that is all. The rest you know."

The sentinel laid his hand on the lion-tamer's shoulder. He stiffened to his task. "By my musket, you have been long winded!" he said. "If yon holy father had not detained you, you would have, this last half-hour, been safe in the Court House." His eyes belied the gruff words, but leveling his rifle he signaled Pasanello to walk before him.

The old priest paced with them until they reached the cell and the sentinel gave his prisoner to the officers.

"The mayor will be informed of your deed and will act quickly," he assured him in parting. "To your prayers, Signor Pasanello!"

The lion-tamer reached his hand through the cell bars, and touched the priest who still waited with bowed head.

"You have been very kind, good father," he said.

"Before you go, tell me you believe my story, and give me your blessing."

The priest lifted his head. "I believe thy words," he returned. "Yet the plucking of the apple means death. But one thing can prevent it and that thou canst not count on."

"I would ask thee—dost thou repent?"

"Of my sins—yes, father. Of plucking the apple—no. I have had enough of life as I have found it. Yet, of thy kindness, tell me what is that *one* thing that might overthrow my fate?"

Holding the priest's hand, he flashed a quick smile at him. "From what I have heard of these people and their golden tree it must be an extraordinary happening that would appease their wrath at one who robbed its branches."

The old man shook his head. "You will learn of it on the morrow, when the multitude are assembled, my son—on that hour—that hour—" His voice trembled and broke.

"Think not of it, good father—but give me thy blessing."

The priest raised his hand and murmured the benediction, then with uncertain steps took his way out into the sunshine.

The morrow came, and from far and wide the people assembled to see the law of their country carried out. A vast indignation swayed them, and

small pity was expressed for the prisoner, a comparative stranger who had returned their hospitality by crime against their beloved tree.

The King's heralds, in their red and blue and gold tunics, had cried the news of the lion-tamer's deed from the city walls on the North, the South, the East and the West. The papers had flamed it out in the reddest of type. The children called it to each other excitedly, and the old stood and gossiped over it. The mothers with babies in their arms held them close, thinking of the dread things that can overtake men who were once as dear and little as those they held.

The King himself was far away on a hunting trip, or something might have been heard from him, as his moods were many, and the new lion-tamer in favor with him. But in the matter of the tree of gold the people of Midas took no advice of Kings.

The mayor, aldermen, lawyers and judges had spent the night discussing the theft. They had interviewed the lion-tamer, taken the evidence of the priest and sentinel, gazed solemnly upon the golden apple with its short, twisted stem, and looked upon the branch from which it had been broken.

The crime was fixed upon the lion-tamer, to everybody's satisfaction, and there was no appeal. Therefore the hour for his execution had been set.

His death was to take place at the ringing of the next noontide bells.

The hour came on apace. Now throngs pressed and swayed around the grassy square of the golden apple tree. All knew the King's lion-tamer, as the royal lions were often shown in public, and a sensation of awe and horror swept over the multitude, for they were a happy people with a dread of tragedy. Yet the law was the law, the golden tree a thing mystical and almost sacred. The deed against it must, they agreed, be avenged.

The bells rang out a quarter to twelve, and the mayor and aldermen, lawyers and judges, all in their robes of office, came out on a platform before the City Hall.

The crowd made way for a group of people from the court. They were all mounted and later would go hunting, but they delayed their sport a little to see this greater thing.

Among them were old and young; friends of the King, and ladies and gentlemen in waiting to the Princess. They wore hunter's green, braided with gold that flashed as they rode. The little Princess was not among them, but the Lady Belledown was of those who led the way.

When the bells had done striking the quarter to twelve, two soldiers came out from the City Hall, and the lion-tamer walked between them. He

wore, as he had the day before, only the leopard skin about his body, the leather sandals on his feet, and above his knee the golden garter set with topaz, whereon was cut the King's seal.

He took his stand, towering among that richly clad company as a figure strangely out of place, and his spirit seemed quiet and unruffled. A herald blew a loud bugle-blast, and the people swayed nearer. The group of courtiers drew rein tighter on their restless horses.

When the herald's notes died away, the mayor spoke. His crimson robes marked him from the others, and his voice carried far.

"Citizens of the City of Midas!" he said. "We have come to see the law of our city maintained. The King's lion-tamer, who comes from a far and unknown country, has violated our most sacred code. He has plucked the imperishable fruit of our golden tree, the tree of Midas. There is the apple!" He held the golden globe up high for all to see. "The witnesses to the deed," he continued, "are the sentinel and the good priest who stands below our platform here!"

A low, angry murmuring ran through the crowd and grew in volume and force.

The mayor lifted his hand for silence, and spoke again.

"This crime was wanton and without excuse, and

witnessed. Therefore the highest judge of our land has pronounced sentence of death upon Pasanello, the King's lion-tamer!"

The people broke into a hoarse clamoring, but the mayor again commanded silence.

"Wait, good citizens!" he said. "For we have ever been of a fair and open mind. Old as is this law of ours, that the one who plucks the golden fruit shall die, you surely remember—though it is two score years since the tree was last robbed—that there is *another* law just as old." He paused and a deep silence followed his words. Then—"Tell us the other law!" they cried impatiently, "and be quick in telling." And many called: "We know of no other law! We know of none!"

The mayor looked over the upturned faces surging toward him.

"Ay!" he returned. "You have all heard of this other law but have chosen to forget. I will remind you."

He unrolled an old parchment. "Hereon is written," he continued, "the only laws regarding the golden tree.

"In this place," pointing to it with his finger, "I read: 'The penalty of death is to be inflicted on any mortal who has come of age and thereafter breaks even *one* golden apple from the golden tree—unless' (Now mark you all!) 'unless when the

criminal is brought out for execution, and haply he or she be unwedded, there should arise one among you who will willingly offer to marry that one who is under death sentence, and lead him or her away down the rose-mist path that runs around our mountains—and so out of our land forever!”

The lion-tamer stood as one little concerned with what was going on. As much as one so strong could, he looked tired, and his face was not anxious, but sad.

The court people petted their nervous horses, and beside the gallows a black-robed man looked about in sullen restlessness.

Again the mayor raised his hand.

“If there be any woman among you, whether old or young, who will wed this man, Pasanello, and go with him into the unknown lands—let her come forward!”

His clear voice rang out to the uttermost edge of the people.

A stillness answered. All eyes were lifted to the lion-tamer. His face was raised now a little disdainfully, and he seemed to smile.

Then through the crowd there ran a sudden stirring, and a word was called out here and there that soon melted into a muffled roar like the sea.

The crowd parted, and up through the midst of it came a strange little half-wild figure; a girl,

young—oh, very young—with bare brown feet, and tattered blue gown and tanned gypsy face and hands. A cloud of long, tangled, yellow hair blew about her head, and her eyes were sea-blue, with the blackest lashes that were ever seen.

In one hand she carried a rough crook, and behind her trailed a flock of gray geese, kept together by the unceasing attention of a small, shaggy dog, who saw to it that they followed the little goose-girl, and not their own will.

On she came, lightly as a brown leaf blows over the ground, until she reached the platform where stood the mayor and the city fathers and the soldiers with their prisoner.

At the foot of the platform she stopped, looked up, and then around. Then she dipped a courtesy and smiled at them all.

"An it pleases everybody," she said sweetly, "I will wed the King's lion-tamer and lead him away down the rose-mist road—for I know it well. So, he be willing, we will go away, and never come again, forever! an' ever! an' ever!"

The lion-tamer had leaned forward as she began to speak, and now looked down into her blue eyes that were raised to his. Down and down he looked into the very depths of their sea blue, and they answered his gaze steadily.

"You have heard!" the mayor said to the peo-

ple with a wide gesture of his arms. "This little maid from the hills is willing to wed the prisoner." He turned to the lion-tamer, smiling. "Prisoner," he commanded, "what say you?"

As one in a dream he leaned toward her. "Ay!" he said softly. "By my faith, I will gladly wed thee, sweetheart! I will take thee at thy word and follow any rose-mist path where thou dost lead the way. There is that in thine eyes that calls me to thee across the very path of Death."

Then the mayor stepped down and led the little goose-girl up to the platform.

"Come you also, good father," he said to the old priest.

With light step the little goose-girl crossed the platform to Pasanello. He took her hand, and so they stood while the priest spoke the words that wedded them.

Then the lion-tamer, caring nothing for the presence of the staring people or the mayor and judges, took the tattered maid in his arms and bent his lips to hers.

A sudden cheering broke from the throats of all the crowd below, for all the world loves a lover.

Then in gossipy groups all scattered and went their way. The ladies and gentlemen of the court last, for it had proved so rare an entertainment.

When the green square was almost clear, the lit-

tle goose-girl took the lion-tamer's hand. "Come!" she said softly. "Come, Pasanello; we must go as we promised."

"Truly—yes, sweetheart, as we promised. We will not linger." He turned to the old priest.

"Good father, we give you thanks, and farewell, and eternal remembrance."

After that they went, while the priest watched them, across the square of the golden tree and down the golden highway. There his old eyes lost them, but on they went out of the city gates and on to the road of the rose-mist, the geese following behind them, and the small shaggy dog.

Hand in hand they went, and joyously and lightly as the leaves blow over the ground, and they laughed and talked and looked into each other's eyes.

When the city was almost lost behind them, the little goose-girl caught her two hands around the lion-tamer's arm and turned her face up to him.

"Look at me, Pasanello!" she cried softly.

"Have I done aught but gaze at thee since the moment you came?" he questioned, smiling.

"Oh, I know!" she admitted. "But look again. Tell me what—whom thou dost see!"

Pasanello looked, and suddenly caught her to him.

"Who art thou?" he questioned. "Oh, who art

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thou—thou most strange little maid? Methinks I know thy face—yet doubt. Who art thou?"

"The Princess," she nodded against his shoulder. "Only the little Princess, Pasanello, stained brown with the juice of berries. You see I loved you—even—*even yesterday.*"

"Oh, little Princess!" he cried, touching her yellow hair. "Forget yesterday. To-day and forever it is only you I love!"

I do not know where they went to live. I have heard that the King of the City of Midas and the country thereabout rode after them, and found them, and gave them castles and gold and lands and all the lovely things that people really do not need. But I am not sure about this. Pasanello may be only a shepherd somewhere in their hills, and the Princess may yet tend a flock of gray geese. No, I do not know for certain where they went or how they lived. The only thing I am *really* sure of is that they were happy wherever it was, and if we ever run across them, we will find they are happy still.

THE PRINCESS PANDORA

THE Princess Pandora sat in the garden one midsummer day and watched the head gardener cut roses to fill the great rose jars in the palace halls.

She sat very still on one of the white marble seats that were scattered rather like tombstones here and there under the trees, and her attendant ladies strolled about, watching her furtively, the better to keep in touch with her passing moods.

An ebony-hued hideous dwarf in brightly embroidered tunic stood behind the Princess and waved a huge feather fan, and the court jester, who was slight and handsome, turned a series of handsprings across the grass before her, in the faint hope that he would thereby bring a smile to her lovely but weary and unutterably bored little face.

His bells tinkled in pleasant chime, and his performance appeared to delight him personally to such an extent that he occasionally laughed aloud, or drew his scarlet lips into merry curves and twists. Then across the lawn he rolled in a red and yellow hoop, and finally came to a pause before the Princess, with his variegated heels in air, and all

the belled points of his motley suit turned upside down.

"Thank you, Beppo," she said gently, "that was very nice—very clever—but you need not do it any more."

The jester suddenly righted himself, and sat down cross-legged on the green.

"But it used to amuse you, your Highness," he said, wagging his head, a look of chagrin shadowing his face.

"That is quite true, Beppo. Indeed it used to. I remember when I thought it very funny, and even laughed; but I am tired of it, you see."

"Yes," said the jester, nodding slowly and breathing deeply, by reason of his recent exertions. "Oh, yes, I see."

The dwarf waved the fan indolently. From the expression on his shining black face he was neither asleep nor awake, but in the delectable borderland midway between.

"I see," remarked the jester again, thoughtfully. Then a sudden smile lit up his eyes, and he gave a soft whistle as of one overtaken by a happy thought.

"Let us go and look at the peacocks," he exclaimed; "they are spreading their tails most beautifully to-day."

"The peacocks!" said the little maid with a sigh. "Oh, Beppo! I thought you were going to say

something quite different—that you had a really new idea. I am tired to death of the peacocks.”

“We might feed the swans?” he suggested, his head on one side. “It is always jolly good fun to feed the swans, don’t you know?”

“I suppose it might be if they were ever hungry,” she said, “but the swan-keeper feeds them so much, they never are hungry, and they always seem so condescending and patronizing when I offer them biscuits. They are so very grand about nothing at all, for they only swim round, and round, and round.”

“And round, and round, and round,” continued the jester. “Quite so. I follow you. You mean something like this”—waving his arm in slow circles.

“Yes,” she nodded, “that’s the way. I am exceedingly tired of the swans, Beppo.”

The ladies-in-waiting trailed their satin gowns over the lawn and yawned very frequently. The old head gardener went on snipping off red and white roses; the black dwarf waved his fan. Over the purple flowers of a trumpet vine close by, many bumble bees hummed their soft bass solos.

“Would you enjoy a game of tic-tac-toe?” asked the jester after a while.

The Princess Pandora glanced at him. “I am no child,” she said, in a little cold tone. “You seem to forget I am almost seventeen.”

"Pardon!" he cried with mock humility. "But let me see—now, anyone of any age could play battledore and shuttlecock—"

"No, no!" she interrupted him. "I have no desire to play that either. It is duller than croquet, and croquet is duller than tennis, and tennis is worse than nine-pins, and nine-pins is so desperately tedious that you remember I told you to give all the pins away."

"Really, your Highness, I had forgotten," he said ruefully. Then, as one at his wit's end: "but there was a time when you liked those games—and the *games* are the same."

"Yes," she returned, "there was a time. I am just tired of them, that is all. They don't seem worth while; one does not live to play games—or be amused, Beppo."

"Doesn't one?" he mused, glancing down at his motley. Silence fell between them for a little, and the shadow crept around the sun-dial. A locust in one of the trees suddenly started his queer song, and as suddenly stopped.

The jester leaned forward, his chin on his hand. "I could tell you a story," he said, his face brightening; "a perfectly good story."

"A new one, Beppo?" questioned the little Princess, almost eagerly. "Without kings, or queens, or princesses in it, and without princes on

prancing steeds, or lovers riding through enchanted forests, or giants, or robbers, or robbers' caves and hidden treasure—a story without a single fairy-godmother or horrible dwarf, or beggar-maid who turned out to be a princess, or fiery dragon, or sleeping beauty—or—”

The jester clapped his hands to his ears, and his face grew frankly miserable.

“Nobody on earth *could* tell a story and leave all those things out,” he exclaimed.

“Unless they can,” she returned, with a faint smile flitting across her little pale face, “unless they can I don’t want to hear a story, Beppo.”

The jester uncrossed his legs and crossed them the other way. Then he tinkled the bells on the long pointed toes of his red and yellow shoes.

“How would your Highness like a taffy-pull?” he ventured after a pause. “There are worse things than a taffy-pull—or—or we might pop corn and roast chestnuts, and make a pumpkin-head with a candle inside.”

“Oh, dear, Beppo!” she answered gently, “whatever would be left to do on Hallowe’en? Is that all you can think of?”

“We could run races—tag—you know,” he said doubtfully.

“I suppose we could,” answered the Princess, “but what for?”

"It that a riddle, your Highness?"

"If you care to call it one, Beppo."

"Well—'just for fun' is the answer," he returned, his smiles back again.

The little Princess shook her head.

"It wouldn't be," she said. "You would not run your fastest—and none of the court ladies would run their fastest, and you would all let me win, I know. That kind of a race does not amuse me any more, and anyway, I am too grown up for it."

"Oh," he said, uncrossing his legs again, "if you look at it that way, of course; but—do you know"—glancing up at her keenly—"it seems to me, your Highness, that you are the victim of an attack—a very small one, of course—but still an attack of 'ennui.'"

"What is 'ennui,' Beppo?" questioned the Princess, with some interest. "That is the word my godmother cut out of my French dictionary, I believe. I have always wanted to know what word it was—at least, I used rather to want to know."

"Well, you do know, your Highness. You have it," said Beppo, winking one eye.

"That is nonsense," she answered. "Kindly tell me what it means."

"Then let me see," he hesitated, casting about in his mind. "It means—it means—traveling on a

long gray road under a gray sky, with gray sodden fields on either side, and not traveling to get anywhere in particular, and having no company."

The Princess threw up her small hands. "That is the silliest explanation I ever heard!" she exclaimed. "I have the palace gardens, and the court ladies, and many games—and you—and, oh! a thousand things."

"It was silly," he said in a crestfallen way. "I'll have another try at it. It means that you have everything you want."

"That's entirely different from the other explanation, anyway, only perhaps it means that I have everything. I haven't *wanted* anything for quite a long time."

"That's nearer it," he nodded; "that's about what it means. And the cure—"

"Yes, the cure?" broke in the little maid.

"The cure is just to want something, or to want something—*tremendously*."

"Do *you*, Beppo?" she asked.

A swift smile crossed the jester's face.

"Rather!" he said, making a sudden pass at a heavy-winged bumble bee.

"And do the maids-of-honor?" she asked again slowly.

"They do, indeed, your Highness. They are keen for new gowns and finer jewels, and more balls

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and richer lovers, and more of them. They never have enough of any of those things.”

“And *I*—I have far more than I want,” she returned with a sigh.

“Even more lovers?” he asked, leaning towards her.

“Oh, yes,” she answered, “there were three came to ask the King for my hand in marriage only last week.”

“I believe I saw them,” said the jester, with a droll wink. “One was short and broad—oh, very broad, and he glittered in green and gold; and one was tall and spare—most exceedingly spare—and he glittered in rose and silver; and one was thick-set and fierce-eyed and black-bearded like a pirate, and he glittered even more than the others in armor that seemed made of jet. It is quite true you have plenty of lovers, your Highness.”

Then, after a moment, he looked up at the Princess sidewise.

“The poor never suffer from ‘ennui,’” he said; “they have always something to interest them—something to want—something to strive for. I myself was hungry once, tremendously hungry; you can have no idea what an interesting experience it was. I assure you the poor get a good deal out of life; they really live it.”

“I have never seen any poor,” said the Princess.

"There are none in the kingdom. The King has had them all banished, I believe."

"That is quite true," the jester returned. Then suddenly he sprang to his feet, all his bells a-jingle.

"The box of blue butterflies!" he exclaimed. "I had forgotten all about it. The hunters have had it sent, as the King ordered, and the butterflies are to be set free at once in the garden."

"I would like to see the butterfly hunters and hear from themselves the story of where they searched, and how they captured them," said Pandora. "Send the butterfly hunters to me here."

Beppo's face lengthened.

"The hunters did not return, your Highness," he said slowly, "only the box was shipped from a far port. In the damp, hot country where these butterflies were caught, men often fall ill of a strange fever. This evil befell the men who followed the King's orders. They did not return."

The little Princess gave a slight shiver in the warm sunshine. Her jeweled hands moved restlessly for a moment, then were still.

"Tell the servants to bring the box of butterflies," she commanded.

The jester obeyed, and shortly returned with two servants, who carried between them a great glass box, lightly covered at the top with silver wire.

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Through the glass gleamed the wonderful wings of many dazzling blue butterflies. The Princess caught her breath at the sight. They were of every shade of blue, and were iridescent. Their wings sparkled and glittered, and caught the light like blue flame.

"Unfasten the screen, and set them free!" cried the Princess, clapping her hands. "Let them fly through the sun. Oh, Beppo! Did you ever see such beautiful things?"

Beppo never had, apparently, by the way he watched them. But his wise young face looked white and sad for the moment, and he said little in answer.

"Do you not like them, Beppo?" exclaimed the Princess, half-impatiently. "Do you not wonder at them? Why don't you say something?"

"I was thinking; pardon me, your Highness, just thinking."

"Of what?" she demanded imperiously.

"Of the deep swamp-land where these pretty things come from, and of the hot fever mists that rise there at night; of the loneliness of the jungles, and the darkness of the long nights when there is no moon," he returned gently.

The Princess gave a little shrug. "Don't spoil it all," she said, "and just as I am getting interested."

The jester laid one hand on his heart, and bowed low. The merry curves came swiftly back to his mouth.

"What is your royal pleasure?" he inquired.

"Unfasten the screen, as I said before," said the Princess.

Beppo turned the screws and lifted the wire cover from the glass box. The butterflies seemed to realize that their imprisonment was over, for one by one they rose, unfurled their exquisite wings, and fluttered up into the rose-scented air.

One by one they went, and the Princess watched their flight with soft exclamations of admiration. Then after a little she watched them in silence and with less intentness, and when the very last of the blue wings had flown up from the box she sat down rather wearily on the marble seat again.

"There are so many of them, Beppo," she said, "and after all they are only butterflies, and all alike."

"Oh, hardly!" he replied laughingly, "they are of a thousand different shades!"

"But all blue," she insisted, "and they flutter just like common butterflies. Tell them to take the box away."

The jester glanced into the empty glass cage before replacing the cover.

"Why, your Highness," he exclaimed, "there is

still another butterfly at the bottom. His wings are folded together, and are like dead leaves. I will stir him a little with a blade of grass to make him fly out also."

The Princess went over to the box and looked in.

"He is very ugly and big," she said, "and his wings are just like faded autumn leaves, as you say. He seems asleep. Yes, stir him up and make him fly away."

The jester took a long blade of grass, and touched the quiet butterfly. Two, three times he touched him, and then the dull-colored wings fell slowly open—and, marvel of marvels, on the upper side they shone with all the hues of the rainbow.

The blue butterflies appeared to have found their paradise in the rose garden; but this one flew high and straight toward the garden walls. His wings might have been set with cut jewels, they so blazed with the reflected light, and were of all the colors that we of this world know.

"Follow him! Follow him, Beppo," cried Pandora, gathering up her long gown, and starting in pursuit of the butterfly. "Don't let him escape from the garden. See, he is over the wall!"

The jester caught the Princess by the hand, and off they ran wildly.

On and on and on they went; their young feet skimmed the ground.

The old gatekeeper gazed after them with staring eyes and mouth open as they passed him.

The red-coated sentinels on duty almost dropped their rifles. The maids-of-honor, who had followed in half-hearted fashion as far as the gates, thinking Beppo and the Princess were trying some new and extraordinary game, gave up the chase as they grew overheated, and returned aimlessly to the lawn.

Down the King's highway flew the strange butterfly, and swiftly after him came the Princess and the jester with his bells jingling and jangling, and his long-toed shoes raising little puffs of white dust on the road.

All the pins slipped out of the Princess's hair, and the wind caught it and blew it out in a golden cloud. Still her little jeweled feet kept pace beside Beppo's red and yellow ones, and neither she nor the jester thought of giving up the chase. Neither felt tired or hot or discouraged, though the butterfly was far in the lead.

One idea possessed them—to overtake it, capture it, and bring it back to the King's garden.

Sometimes it would alight for a moment, and then the two, with much soft creeping, tried to gain on it a little; but it was off and away always long before they reached it. However, these pauses gave them rest and new strength. And now the

country changed as they ran on. There were fewer castles, fewer great gardens of the rich. Here and there was a farmer's house, a blacksmith's forge, a humble church, a shepherd's hut.

On the highway now and again one would pass them whose clothing was not the gay clothing of a courtier. A blind beggar even stopped them to ask for alms.

Yet on flew the butterfly, and the little Princess and Beppo ran after it in mad pursuit. They had no breath now to spare for talking, and anyway the matter did not seem to need talking about.

Longer grew the shadows; they fell across their path from tall, wayside trees in black bars. And now the sun slipped behind the hills. By and by the last rosy gleam died out of the west, and twilight came.

Still they caught the glint of the strange bejeweled wings, and still they ran on in their wake.

But at last, when they were almost spent, the butterfly settled on the branch of a tree, closed its wings together like dead oak leaves, and became lost to sight among the other leaves, as though he had donned a fairy's invisible cloak.

The Princess sank down by the roadside and tears filled her eyes.

"He is lost! lost!" she cried, panting for breath. "We will never, never catch him now."

"Oh, yes, we will," replied the jester, his heart beating hard. "*To-morrow!* I will watch for him at earliest dawn. Now though, I must take you home."

"But I will not go home without the butterfly," she said determinedly. "Thank you just the same, Beppo."

"Do you mean you will stop here all night?" exclaimed the jester.

"Of course," she answered calmly. Beppo shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"Well, if you will stay, there's a shepherd's hut yonder," he suggested. "Could you sleep there, do you think?"

"Certainly I can sleep there," she said. "Why not? And certainly the shepherd can give us some supper, and then in the morning we will be ready to catch the butterfly. But"—eagerly—"do you really think we will catch him?"

"I think we will," he answered. "People usually do get what they go after, when they go after it as—as hard as we've been going for some miles. Come, it grows darker; we will go."

They found indeed the hut had belonged to a shepherd. His crook hung on the wall, and a pile of sheepskins had been his bed, but no shepherd was within, neither was there a candle in the place, nor any food.

"Are you very hungry, Princess?" asked the jester anxiously.

"Yes, Beppo, I am," she replied, sitting down on the shepherd's bed. "It is a most interesting feeling, Beppo."

He smiled in the dark. "And you want the butterfly?" he said. "That also, I should think, was another interesting feeling. Now, if your Highness will rest I will go and try and find our supper."

Pandora lay back on the woolly skins and closed her eyes, though she had no intention of going to sleep. She knew she was so hungry she could not possibly do anything of the sort. Nevertheless, presently she was dreaming that she and Beppo still followed the radiant butterfly down a long and unknown road.

When she opened her eyes it was high morning, and the sun streamed into the rough little hut. Beppo was looking in at the window, and he had a jug of milk in one hand and a loaf of black bread in the other.

"The butterfly?" questioned the Princess, rising quickly. "Oh, the butterfly, Beppo?"

He shook his handsome head, and his half-merry, half-sad face looked down at her.

"The butterfly," he hesitated, then went on, "the butterfly has gone—there is no trace of it. I have

looked far and wide. Perhaps it flew away in the night."

She gave a little disappointed cry. "I wanted it so," she said bitterly. "Oh, I wanted it."

"It is very interesting," answered the jester softly, "to want anything that much, little Princess. It is better than not wanting anything—much better."

"You are unkind," she answered with a catch of her breath. "Now that I've lost the butterfly, you know that I will want it always; and who can tell where it has gone?"

He smiled at her. "But it is *somewhere*, and you may have the hope of finding it—just any time. That, too, adds zest to life, my Princess."

Pandora was busy eating a large piece of coarse black bread. She waited till it was quite finished and she had taken a long drink of milk. Then she answered.

"Perhaps that is true," she admitted, "but I hardly think you understand how much I wanted that butterfly, Beppo. No man could understand. He was so beautiful. So beautiful! I don't believe you ever wanted anything so much as I wanted that."

"Don't you?" he answered, flipping his bauble in the air, his whimsical smile coming and going. "Really, don't you, your Highness?"

The Princess flicked the crumbs of black bread out of the window to some common little sparrows, who fell upon them greedily.

"No," she reiterated, "I don't believe you ever wanted anything so much as I wanted the butterfly."

There was a pause, while the sparrows chattered. "But—but, did you, Beppo?" she ended.

The jester tossed the bauble high, and caught it lightly.

"Yes," he answered. "Oh, yes!"

"Well, what did you want, then?" she questioned, her eyes round with curiosity. "I would really like to know."

"I wanted to be a Prince," he said, "since you command me to tell you."

"A Prince!" she exclaimed, "but why? Why a Prince, Beppo? They are very dull as a rule, and they are selfish often, and not always handsome—or amusing—or even charming of manner, or any of those things, while you—you are much better than any Prince I have ever seen, for you are never dull, and never selfish, and you are always handsome, and generally amusing, and you have the most charming manner. Oh, Beppo, there is no smallest reason in your wishing to be a Prince."

"There is one reason," he answered, still tossing the bauble.

"Then what is it?" she asked. "Why not tell me?"

"If I were a Prince," he exclaimed, "I could ride to the Palace hall and ask the King for the hand of his daughter in marriage."

"Oh, Beppo!" she said, with a little soft cry. "Oh, Beppo!"

Then she touched one of his red and yellow sleeves with her small hand. "The King," she said in so low a voice the jester had to bend down to hear it, "the King has many titles in his gift. I—I will ask him to make you a Prince, Beppo." And having said so much she hid her eyes against his motley shoulder.

But the jester lifted her rose-bright face, and made her look up into his eyes.

"Little Princess! Little Princess!" he said. "Do you know what you would do?"

"Truly, dear jester," she answered, "I do know. I leave joking to you. For me—I am in earnest."

Then he caught her fast in his arms, and the bells on all the points of his pied tunic chimed together.

"The butterfly led us into the country of love, sweetheart," he cried, softly, "into the country where no one is ever wearied of the days or nights, but always desires the morrow."

The Princess glanced up through her lashes and smiled at him.

"He has also brought us into the country of the poor—to judge by the loaf of black bread and the jug of milk you brought for breakfast; and the poor—did you not tell me yourself, Beppo—the poor never lack for interest in their lives?"

"So I told you," he nodded, smiling back.

"Then I will surely ask the King to make you a Prince over this very country," she asserted, "and we two will learn of the poor how it is *they* never know that unspeakable sensation you called 'ennui'—that word my godmother cut out of the French dictionary."

The jester stooped and kissed a curl of her yellow hair.

"Yes, sweetheart, we will learn of the poor," he answered, "I like that idea of yours very much."

THE JEWELLED PRINCESS

THEY tell me this story happened about the year One, and in a country—a wonderful country—that lies just over the rim of the world; across the place where the sky and the earth go into a gray blur, you know!

The country is there now; anyone can go to it at any time, and it is quite as wonderful as it used to be when my Princess—the jeweled one—lived there, ever so long ago.

I thought it would make it more interesting to tell you this; but now the story really begins:

The King and Queen of Dazzledean had no children. Everybody else, even the very poor people, seemed to have any number, and so the King and Queen wanted them too—very much. They wanted about ten, but they would have tried to be content with less.

At last, as time went on, and there was nobody in the palace but decidedly grown-up people—the kind who walked, but never ran; smiled, but never laughed; talked in long, hard words, and liked to stay indoors when it rained—why, the Royal couple

felt that they had come to the limit of their patience.

Sober, uninteresting folk of this sort bored them unspeakably, and they felt they had reached such a pass that they would be satisfied with one little child. They didn't even make a point of saying whether it should be a boy or a girl.

They wanted to hear quick, light little footsteps running up the great stairs, and the sound of eager, merry voices ringing from room to room; the noise of games being played out in the big gardens, and the galloping of ponies up and down the graveled walks.

The King got so dreadfully tired of his library, full of leather-covered books in dead languages, that he locked it up, and wouldn't go near it. But he ordered dozens of picture-books, the nicest ones he could hear of—and all those just because it was a relief to see them around.

And then, what do you think happened? Now, what *do* you think? Why, there was a little baby Princess sent to the palace! Yes, really! A perfectly darling, little, sweet, pinky baby Princess! You never in all your lives heard anything like the mad ringing of the bells of Dazzledean then!

All the old bell-ringers (and there were twenty of them in leather suits) got tired out in no time, because, you see, they had been used to so little exercise. The bells had only been rung for fires and

church before, so naturally the bell-ringers wouldn't have much muscle to speak of.

But the King ordered the ringing to be kept up for six hours, so all the boys, the football and cricket boys, went up into the belfry and took a turn at the ropes.

And they had feasts, too, and torchlight processions, and fireworks, and brass bands at the corners of the streets.

All the prisoners that were waiting to be executed, in whatever way they do it in that country, were set free; and all the others who had been kept in dungeon cells for years and years till everybody had forgotten what they were put in for, were set free. And all the debtors who hadn't any money to pay their debts were let out of their prisons and set free, and it was a most happy time.

As for the orphans in the orphan homes, they had ice-cream, and the children in the Sick Children's Hospital were told to wish, and they could have whatever they wanted most. The King got a special fairy to come and give it to them—for there were fairies in that kingdom.

And that is how all the trouble came. You see, the King and Queen invited the fairies to the christening of the baby Princess in the ordinary way, but, unfortunately, one of the fairies was forgotten. That is just the kind of carelessness that

has been the cause of more trouble than anyone will ever know or dream of.

It was a very splendid affair, the christening, and all the wise, and old, and high and mighty were there from far and near. All the soldiers and sailors, all the knights and ladies, all the squires and dames, all the little glittering pages in silver and gold, and all the fairies were there; that is, *all* the fairies but the *one* who had been forgotten when the invitations were sent out. She was a Grand Duchess, and it was the greatest mystery how she could possibly have been forgotten.

But, at the last minute, when the Archbishop, in his crimson and white robe, was just taking his place; and the King and Queen, in their ermine and purple robes, were just taking their places; and the head lady-in-waiting, carrying the little Princess in her pearl-embroidered robe, was just taking her place, and the fairies were all folding their rainbow-hued wings, and standing on tiptoe to see; and all the people, from those of the most importance down to those of no importance at all, were in a flutter of suppressed expectation and excitement—suddenly, there was a clap of thunder that shook the building, and down through the air, as though she slipped on a long ribbon of lightning, came the forgotten fairy!

She took her place near the Archbishop, where

the godmothers and godfathers stand, and her face was dark with fury, while her eyes fairly flashed fire.

"I shall not ask how it happened that I was overlooked at this auspicious time," she said, addressing His Majesty; "nor shall I demand explanations or apologies. Every princess born in Dazzledean is my goddaughter by right, and I shall not fail to bestow a gift upon this one. Proceed!"

So they proceeded, though the Archbishop's voice shook, and the King and the Queen could hardly make the responses, their teeth chattered so.

Everybody in the church was in a state of inward panic, down to the last and least kitchen wench on the edge of the throng and her knees simply knocked together.

Indeed, the only person who did not seem a penny the worse was the Princess, and she slept serenely through the whole ceremony.

After it was over, and she had been named Emeraldalda Rubyona Pearleata Sapphireana Turquoise, the fairies came up to bestow upon her their gifts. They gave her beauty and grace, and wit and wisdom, and courage, and many, many other things which lots of people have who have no fairies at their christening at all.

Now, just when the Royal couple were beginning to cheer up a trifle, the fairy who had been for-

gotten came forward with *her* gift. Her voice still trembled with anger, as she touched the sleeping baby with her star-tipped wand.

"I will give her *Vanity*," she said. "And her vanity shall change her beauty to the things it is said to resemble." So saying, she unfolded her glistening wings, and flew away through the sunlight.

Then one other, a very insignificant fairy, and the last one of all, came up and touched the Princess with her wand—quite a common affair, without any star worth mentioning—and she spoke in a small, muffled voice that hardly anybody heard.

"I will give her *Unselfishness*," she said. "And by it she shall turn her beauty back to what she wishes it to be." Saying this, she, too, flew away.

When the King and Queen and all the rest heard the fairy who had been forgotten bestow her gift, they were tremendously relieved to find that things were no worse. Vanity is certainly an undesirable attribute, but when you come to think of the things that might have been given, you can easily see it was not so bad. A little vanity, anyway, is naturally looked for in a princess, and they concluded it could, with judicious training, be kept within bounds.

In fact, after the forgotten fairy flew away, everybody began talking at once, and no one paid

much attention to the last fairy's gift of Unselfishness. It was not a very popular virtue at Court, and was considered old-fashioned, out of date, and rather absurd. To be sure, the Archbishop, who was himself somewhat old-fashioned, had smiled over at the small, insignificant fairy, as though he understood, but that was not noticed.

Well, after this, things went on in a delightful way at the palace of Dazzledean. The Princess grew fast, and was so merry, so bright, and so happy that she kept the whole Court in high spirits. She seemed to love everybody, and everybody loved her; and she wasn't a bit proud, but would play battledore and shuttlecock with the smallest kitchen maid, if there did not happen to be a page just at hand.

She grew more and more beautiful, and, alas! as time went on, vainer and vainer also. There was no denying it. She would stand before the mirror by the hour, looking at her own charming reflection, when she should have been practicing scales, or reading her book; while she never wearied of being told how perfectly lovely she was.

After a while this grew exceedingly tiresome for everyone except the Princess, for instead of getting better it grew worse. At last, for the sake of peace and quiet, the King engaged a regular staff of paid ladies to do nothing but wait upon the

Princess, pay her compliments, and think of new adjectives to express admiration. Moreover, the Princess, although kind-hearted in every other way, would not allow another beautiful girl to live within the kingdom. Whenever she heard of such an one, that unhappy possessor of the fatal gift was instantly banished.

You can easily understand that no princess could do such things and still keep her popularity.

A feeling of dissatisfaction worked its way amongst the masses of the people, little by little, and bit by bit.

Things went on the same at the palace, though the Princess, who had been so lovable at one time, became more given up to vanity every day. She was still generous and kind, but in return for what she gave she wanted endless pretty flattering speeches. Most of her hours were now spent in a mirrored room, with the ladies who attended her close by, to repeat to her the compliments she delighted in.

It happened on a day that one of the ladies-in-waiting chanced, while taking a little bite of toffee, to chip a corner off one of her teeth—a front tooth, too—and she fell to making a great moan about it.

“Why, Lady Isobell!” exclaimed the rest, “you should not mind. You should be glad it was not the tooth of our adorable Princess!”

"True!" sighed Lady Isobell, "I would not have such a calamity happen to one of her exquisite teeth for millions. Her teeth are pearls, perfect pearls!"

"Do you really think so, dear Lady Isobell?" asked the Princess, smiling.

"Indeed, yes!" all the ladies chimed in together. "Never were there more wonderful pearls than the rows behind your Royal Highness's pink coral lips!"

"Well!" said the Princess, happily, "I am but mortal, and bethink me it would be well to call the court dentist to see that there is no flaw in any one of them."

They all protested that no flaw could be imagined, but the Princess insisted, and the court dentist was called.

It must be confessed he was not overjoyed at the summons, for it is an unpleasant thing to have to hurt a Princess, and there was a chance of it. Therefore, most reluctantly, he packed up his buzzers and borers, and betook himself to the Royal presence.

All was in readiness to receive him, and putting a powerful eyeglass in his best eye, he turned it down upon the lovely mouth of the Princess.

Never before had he seen such a double row of teeth! Never such pink lips. All at once he gave

an exclamation, and the eyeglass fell from his eye.

The Princess sat up in astonishment; the ladies-in-waiting drew closer in alarm.

"Whatever is the matter?" questioned Her Royal Highness, impatiently. "Are my teeth cracked, or crooked, or what?"

"Oh, don't keep us in suspense!" cried all the others wildly.

"A thousand pardons, your Highness," stammered the dentist; "but they are not teeth at all; they are pearls! They are pearls!"

"Pearls?" they all cried, while the Princess gasped.

"Yes, real pearls, and your lips—"

"Go on! Go on! Tell me quickly—my lips —?" she broke in, her eyes wild and frightened.

"Your lips are fast becoming of a substance like coral—if they are not coral now," he answered in a trembling voice, his knees quaking beneath him.

At this the Princess fell back in a dead faint, and most of the ladies instantly followed her example. The others conquered their feelings, and did the best they could to revive the Princess with smelling-salts and burnt feathers; while, in the confusion, the dentist fled to his own quarters.

Things somewhat settled down by the next day; and, indeed, by the end of a week the Princess was not sure that she was not rather better pleased to

have them as they were. Of course, she found as her lips grew more and more corally, that changing their expression grew somewhat difficult, so she just settled them into a little smile, and let them stay there, that was all.

As for teeth of pearl, they were quite as pleasant to have as the other kind, and seemed eminently fitting for one of the Blood Royal.

A few days after this, however, when the Princess was having her shining yellow hair brushed out and sun-bathed, another thing happened. One of the maids suddenly discovered that it was not hair she was drawing the ivory brush through, but that each wonderful, wavy, golden thread was indeed made of the precious, glittering metal itself, the gold from which was wrought the coin of the realm!

The King and Queen lamented greatly at this, and trembled in secret fear, for they realized that now the long-forgotten fairy spell was working its way towards some mysterious end. But the Princess did not seem to mind. She was even more beautiful than ever—more interesting, more entirely different from other people; so, in her opinion, there was nothing to worry about.

She was growing quite used to the weight of her glistening tresses, when, suddenly as before, another change came; this time an alarming one. A

dimness came over the sight of her eyes, and when the wise Court physician examined them, he found, alas! and alas! that they were rapidly turning to the stone so deeply, darkly, beautifully blue that they had long resembled and been likened to. Very shortly, in the lovely pink and white face of the Princess, two great sapphires flashed and shone, and she saw no light of the sun, or the moon, or stars any more, but was in the dark always. No little flickering candle flame passed before those strange eyes could make them wink, and no tears fell from them—no, not a single tear.

Then the King and Queen wept night and day, and they sent messengers to the fairies, imploring them to come back and take away the dreadful spell; but no fairies came.

Still, after a while the Princess began to take comfort out of the thought that she was still beautiful and more unusual than ever.

She wore her most elaborate dresses every day, and all her jewels, and every evening there was a ball held in the palace, and she was led through the great ballroom, with her golden hair puffed and curled about her head, her sapphire eyes gleaming, and her pearl teeth shining behind her smiling coral lips.

And it still seemed to give her delight and gratification to hear on every side that she was far and

away the most beautiful girl in the kingdom; as, indeed, she was, the rest of the beautiful ones having been banished.

It troubled the King and Queen that not a single prince now came to ask the hand of their daughter in marriage. Hitherto they had been used to having them ride up to the palace gates by dozens. But now the Royal riddle-maker, who was there to meet them and ask them a riddle—which, being answered correctly, allowed them to pass in—had simply nothing to do. It could only be supposed, therefore, that princes, being much like other people, preferred princesses who were like other people too.

About this time other troubles began to afflict the kingdom of Dazzledean. A war broke out, a bitter, civil war; and the people not wanting a ruler any longer, but wanting to rule themselves, and being tired of taxes and other unpleasant things, turned the King and Queen and the beautiful blind Princess out of their palace; drove them cruelly beyond the city walls, and locked the gates behind them. And it was a cold, windy, wet night.

Never were there three more miserable, lonely, homesick people than these three, who now felt cold and hunger and loneliness for the first time.

All their rich garments had been taken away

from them, and they had been dressed in the common, coarse, scratchy clothes of the common people.

There was no one to help them find their way, no one to get them anything to eat, no one to put up an umbrella over them to keep off the pelting rain; and it wouldn't have made things much better if there had been, for there wasn't an umbrella.

And, worse than all, there wasn't anyone to tell the poor Princess how beautiful she was; for she was beautiful, even yet, though her hair fell wet and tangled about her like a yellow cloak, and the weight of it tired her out. You see, she wasn't used to walking, especially over rough roads in the rain. Every courtier, every wise counselor, every lord and lady, every squire and dame, every little page, and all the palace people down to the smallest kitchen wench had just vanished away, as though they had never been, and the King said he couldn't think where they had gone.

On and on they went, the Queen and the Princess Emeralda sobbing and clinging to each other, and the King, though footsore and weary, trying to cheer them up.

Here and there along the way they stopped and asked for help, but the people knew who they were,

and said that they didn't want any more of kings or queens or princesses.

So they hurried on. There were village shops on the road, long distances apart, and they would have stopped and bought food, but all their money had been taken away and locked up, and they had not a penny.

After a very, very long time, though, they came to a new country that they had never seen before. It was happiness to find that nobody knew them, and they were most careful indeed not to say that they were a Royal family.

Now, with having slept out of doors in all weather, having been hungry so long, and tired and travel-stained, the Princess appeared to have forgotten all about how beautiful she was. She not only remembered that she was poor, and miserable, and blind, but that she was younger and stronger than her father and mother, and, therefore, ought to help them.

As they walked through the unfamiliar streets she wondered and wondered what she could do; and then all at once an idea came into her mind—such a splendid, unexpected, original idea! She clapped her hands and laughed, just as she used to when she was a gay little girl in the palace in Dazledean.

The forlorn King and Queen stopped in terror and amazement to hear her laugh, for they thought that now the greatest and last trouble of all had come to them, and that the Princess had gone perfectly crazy.

"Whatever is the matter, my love?" exclaimed the Queen; and "Be calm! Be calm!" chimed in the King, patting his daughter on the shoulder.

"Don't laugh, my dear; only people that are insane laugh when they are as miserable as we are," he said.

"But I have thought of something so delightful!" cried the Princess. "We need not be cold and hungry to-night, anyway!"

"Well, we have no friends or money," said her father, shaking his head sadly.

"No," she answered, "but there is my hair, you know!"

"Your hair?" His Majesty gasped, thinking that now at last she really was out of her mind. "Your hair?"

And, "Your hair?" the Queen repeated, joining in weakly; "your beautiful, beautiful hair!"

"Why, yes, dear mother and daddy," she answered. "It is gold, real gold—the kind money is made of! Now, don't you see?"

And when they did, they didn't know whether to be glad or sorry.

"But you will have to cut it off," the Queen said tearfully. "Oh! Emeraldalda Rubyona, how can I ever let you?"

And the King insisted that he would break stones by the roadside first.

Still, it was getting late; the wind was straight from the east, and something was falling that was not exactly snow or rain or hail, but was a mixture of all three, and extremely unpleasant.

With it all, the Princess had hard work to persuade her parents to allow her to cut off her shining hair, but in the end, they were so hungry and wet, they consented. After much debating, they decided to go to the mint, where the money was coined, and exchange the golden hair for golden pounds.

So, borrowing a pair of scissors at a cottage that was just at the edge of a big city they had come to, the Princess merrily snipped off one long, heavy curl after another, and gave them to her mother (who was crying as hard as she could) to tie up into a bundle. Then, putting her hat on her short, wavy locks, she started down the road with her parents, each leading her by a hand, to find the mint.

But a wonderful thing was happening to the Princess just then, as she walked along in the sleet and wind. It seemed that she saw the road, and the wayside trees and houses, like wavering shadows. Plainer and plainer they grew, till at last she felt

sure that it was no dream, but that she really saw again, and that her sapphire eyes were once more just everyday blue eyes with ordinary black lashes, eyes one could wink with, and have the comfort of crying with—just eyes like other people's.

With this, she clapped her hands and laughed, and then cried for joy, and laughed again, till the poor King and Queen were more bewildered than ever. But when she was able to tell them what had happened, they, too, were wild with delight, and they all three stepped on along their way as lightly as though they walked on rose-leaves, instead of cobble-stones; and they forgot the wind that blew through their "looped and windowed raggedness," because the hearts within them were so happy.

Well, after a while, they came to the mint, and you can't imagine how amazed the men who made the gold into sovereigns were, when they saw the bundle of golden hair the Princess wanted to sell them. (Of course, she didn't tell them who she was, though.)

They got out their scales and weighed the curls, and found there were several pounds of them, and I really don't know just how many sovereigns they gave the Princess for them, but it was a very great many.

Then the Princess divided the money into two lots, and gave one lot to Her Majesty the Queen,

and the other to His Majesty the King, and she only kept one lucky piece that had a hole in it for herself, partly because it was a lucky piece, and partly (rather more partly, in fact) because she liked the picture of the Prince that was stamped on one side of it.

They bid good-by to the men at the mint, who were dazed by the beauty of the Princess (she was just the same as ever), by the wonderful golden hair, and by the grand manner of the King and Queen, for kings and queens are just the same, too, whether they are dressed in common clothes or robes of uncommon gorgeousness.

After this, the Royal couple and the Princess bought a little country house with a little garden, and chickens and ducks, and other delightful things, and they kept a little rosy-cheeked maid to help them, and they lived happily—and that is the end. Well, not quite the very end, because the Prince whose picture was stamped upon the golden sovereign with the hole in it (the lucky piece the Princess had kept) happened to drop in at the mint the next day after the Princess had been there, and he chanced to see the curls of gold as the men were about to melt them down. While no one could have called him an exceptionally inquisitive prince, still, he had curiosity enough to ask how they had come by them. After he had heard, he did not rest

day or night until he knew where the Princess was.

Naturally, he thought that any person with hair like that must be very much worth seeing—so he rode up to the little garden gate of the little cottage on his grandest, prancing charger, and, as it was open, he went in, for there was no Royal riddle-maker to ask him riddles he couldn't answer.

This is the real end of the story, and the way all stories ought to end; and so "the Prince found the Princess."

A ROSE ENCHANTED

IT was old Betty of the flower market who told me this story. Old Betty with her crinkly white hair, and her winter-apple face; her red Connemara cloak and cap with the flappidy white ruffles.

Betty said it was her grannie she got the story from; and her grannie got it from her grannie, and so on back and back to the very King and rose it is all about. He was an Irish King Betty said. For there were kings in Ireland in those days and fairies and gray elves and little people who had no name, but lived under the black thorn bushes, mostly.

I asked Betty if the King in the story was Brian Borue. This seemed to worry her a little so I hastily withdrew the question and said it did not matter. But she said, "Sure and it does matther, mavourneen, an' it might have been Brian—I dunno. It was just one of them annyway that lived in them ould grand days whin there was fairies around thick as daisies in the grass—fer those that had eyes to see them—ay, fairies, an' warlocks an' little green min an' the rest av them. An' the things happened as I'm telling ye—though

it ain't jest asy to give names an' dates. So kape whist an' listen—or I'll be tellin' ye no more!"

And this is the story, though I couldn't write in the beautiful brogue of old Betty, nor put in her "nods and becks and wreathed smiles" as the tale unwound bit by bit—business allowing—there under her big umbrella beside her flower-stall in the market.

PART I

Now there are three kinds of fairies—according to old Betty—just as there are three kinds of people.

Firstly—those who are almost perfectly good. Secondly—those who are almost quite bad; and thirdly—those who are like "the little girl who had the little curl" and possess characters composed of a fascinating mixture of good and bad.

The fairy princess, Jewelette, of Betty's story, was like that little girl. Sometimes she was good and sometimes she was horrid.

The fairy king, her father, and the fairy queen, her mother, never admitted that she had been spoiled by their own over-indulgence to her whims and their doting admiration; they simply said that she was made that way.

But in their hearts they were often troubled over the princess, for they themselves were in the almost

perfect class, and would fain have had her there also.

To them a sense of duty was not, as O. Henry says, "that dull, leaden, soul-depressing sensation it is to so many of us." Far from it. To this fairy king and queen it was an uplifting and exhilarating feeling, and they always joyously hastened to perform whatever it dictated—unless it happened to suggest that they correct the princess.

With their little daughter, however, a sense of duty did not seem to count at all.

While she did the things she liked to do with delightful zest and eagerness—no matter how difficult they might be,—the things she did not like to do she simply didn't do, to the consternation of all and sundry.

Yet even fairies have to learn to do the thousand and one things that fairies alone can do. They do not arrive in fairy-land a finished product of knowledge and attainment. Even there there is no royal road to learning. The royal roads are all left to the bees, and butterflies, and beetles, and their like, whom God has gifted in some mysterious way, so they are able to perform the tasks set them just as well the day they come as the day they go. For the bees make honey now as they made it in the days of Job. They apparently have added nothing to their knowledge; and the butter-

flies and beetles and their brethren, the ants, do the very same things over and over in the very same old way they did them in the Garden of Eden. It is as if they had attained perfection too soon, and too easily. So, all things considered, both fairies and people should be content to leave the royal roads to them, and continue to struggle happily along the upward paths that lead to the new and beautiful.

One way and another the princess Jewelette managed to learn a good many things, yet she grew up at her father's court like a wild rose "set round with little willful thorns."

She was so lovely to look at, and so merry withal—when things went right—that the fairies of every rank and age were attracted to her as flowers to the sun. But her moods were variable as the wind—her temper set aflame with a word, and to be near her was like being out in April weather, one hour might be sunny, and on the next none could say where the lightning would strike or the rain fall.

The fairy folk far and near gossiped about the future of the princess Jewelette and agreed that the king and queen were to blame for having spoiled her originally sweet nature.

With her, to wish for was to have, and that is the best receipt in the universe, the fairies said, to create a selfish spirit.

And the little princess was selfish, horribly

selfish, as well as imperious and haughty at times.

She desired the best of everything for herself, first and last. As a rule this was conceded to her naturally, and then all was merry as a May-day. But on those occasions when she was expected to take second-best—whatever form that second-best happened to take—she would turn suddenly into a little fury, and vent her rage on the unoffending fairies nearest at hand.

These deplorable outbursts of temper, roused often by some trivial cause,—such as gaining only second prize in a game or having to give up her place near the throne to some royal visitor and things of that kind,—were most upsetting to the peace-loving courtiers, and they made way more and more for her, and tried to smooth out all the crumpled rose-leaves that lay in her path.

Now, when they all played games in the fairy ring, the little princess was always proclaimed winner. No one's rose-berry ball ever came through the last bent grass hoop and hit the tall mullein stalk, in their games of croquet, before her rose-berry ball. No fairy ever swam round the moon-lit lily-pond and caught the tame silver-fish, until she had accomplished this feat. No one ever found the green and gold elf—who was so like in color to the green and gold mustard plants he could hide among them for hours—until the princess had

found him, though all knew the elf helped her by joggling the plant he was under.

No, it was not in a few things the princess Jewelette wanted to come first, it was in everything.

It is not easy to be the most alluring, the most clever, the most accomplished, the most beautiful and the most all-round successful person at any court, but little by little all these advantages were conceded to the princess as by general consent, and therefore things ran smoothly except on rare occasions when some fairy, whose spirit was not equal to the strain, ventured a protest.

For in the hearts of them all resentment burned hotly. They longed to occasionally beat the princess at some of their games. They desired greatly to sometimes say something brighter than she did, or to out-distance her in one or another of their sports. But they put out these inward fires as best they could. In the case of the fairy maids-of-honor they were extinguished usually with floods of tears shed in private.

Still their policy did not change, for it brought the greatest good to the greatest number; so they outwardly maintained that no one in all the world could at any time or at any place, or in any way, surpass their own princess Jewelette. This she perfectly agreed to, and everything was lovely.

But the king and queen were no longer happy. With keen insight, they saw that while all the court and the fairies throughout their kingdom gave every homage to their child, in their hearts they did not give her love.

And so, though she got all else out of life that seemed worth having, she missed its very essence of joy.

It was not hard to catch the fleeting expression in the eyes of the little maids-of-honor, when the princess was particularly selfish; nor the half-concealed smiles on the lips of the courtiers when she was unbearably imperious. None of these things escaped the king and queen any longer, and they were deeply grieved by them.

Now in this country lived a very, very old fairy who was godmother to the princess Jewelette. Wise was this old fairy and of vast experience in the ways of her own folk, and also of mortals.

She had almost reached the age when she would be made over into something new, for that is what happens to fairies as well as people, old Betty said. As this fairy had been kind and good during her length of sunny days and moonlit nights, she hoped she would be made over into a mortal; even if she were only to be a perfectly new fairy again, with shining wings and a strong light little body, and a rose-tinted radiant face, she felt

she would be content. But to be a fairy and to be old, does not seem consistent—and the princess Jewelette's godmother was growing tired of it.

So she sent her messenger, a gray elf, to the court of the king and queen, and he told them she was coming to see them, and divide between them, and some odds and ends of acquaintances and distant relations, the jewels she had gathered together in her long life. For even fairies cannot take jewels across the border of one life, and into another.

The royal pair listened to the gray elf with sorrowful faces, for they loved the ancient fairy and were not anxious to have her changed or made over in any way.

The little princess listened to the gray elf also, but her face was not sorrowful. It was only gravely attentive.

"Are you not grieved, my daughter," said His Majesty, "that your noble godmother feels the time is near when she will depart from us, only to return in some form we, perchance, may not recognize?"

The princess Jewelette looked up with unshadowed eyes.

"Indeed, my father," she replied softly, "I think she is very old and tired. She does not care to dance in the green rings, and it is a long time

since she floated across the lily pond. Now she only dips in the water at the edge, and then her attendants wrap her about closely and carry her away. I do not think she flies any more over the golden mustard fields,—they dazzle her eyes. All the color and strength have gone from her wings, and they are no longer lovely to look at. I think she is very old and tired, my father.”

“That is true,” said the king. “But what then? Are there not many to wait upon her and do her bidding? Where is there another with her wisdom and knowledge, both of our land and the land of mortals? Where another so patient and gentle withal? The older she grows, the sweeter she becomes to my mind, and in her lovely eyes is the light that time cannot dim. There is much that you might learn of her, my little daughter, before you wed some gallant prince and leave us.”

“She is very old,” repeated the princess again. “What is there left for her to enjoy? I can think of nothing.”

The king turned to the queen with a swift glance. Their eyes met and she answered his look.

“There is Love,” he said. The princess smiled absently, as not noticing any rebuke.

“To me it only seems wondrous sad to be so ancient,” she remarked with a little sigh.

“Peradventure it would be, my dear, if one re-

mained forever so," said her mother. "But with the God-of-All-Things there is no old age. There is only change. It is so great a mystery, this law of change; but it is a law for all alike. Yet in our own hearts is the power to make all change beautiful."

The little princess threw out her hands in protest.

"I do not understand a word you say, mother mine!" she exclaimed. "Nor do I want to change in face or form or heart! If you loved me, you would not speak of such things." Running to the queen, she lifted her lovely face to be kissed—though she frowned as might a spoiled child.

The queen caressed her and sighed.

"You are too young, methinks, to understand," she murmured. "Indeed we would not desire you otherwise in face or form—only—only—"

"Only what?" questioned the princess, quite radiant again.

"Only sometimes we would have you a trifle kinder, sweetheart, or more thoughtful of others," her mother answered. "But look! Look! Yonder comes your godmother and her attendants! Truly she is very feeble,—so hasten to meet her, my child! Hasten!"

The princess clapped her hands. "See, mother mine," she cried. "Oh, see the dear gray elves bearing the jewel-box! I know it well. I think my

godmother will divide her jewels to-day or the gray elves would not have brought them. I long to see them—the wonderful, wonderful jewels!”

Fluttering her silvery wings, the little princess flew across the garden.

Her godmother walked totteringly and by the aid of a tall ebony cane. Now and again she paused and leaned on it when her little court of attendants awaited her pleasure.

They were all afoot, having left their coaches harnessed to green grasshoppers, without the garden wall.

The ancient fairy wore a short quilted petticoat and a scarlet cloak beneath which were folded her weary wings. Upon her head was a white ruffled cap, and upon that a high black steeple hat.

Most of her following were gray elves and they too looked old as gray warped twigs or the lichen on weather-beaten trees.

Six of them carried a black box studded with silver nails, and the weight of it bore them down.

The little princess alighted beside her godmother and caught her face, that was like old carven ivory, between her two soft young hands.

“Dear godmother,” she exclaimed. “Now this is kind! But you are very tired—you should not have made this effort to come and see us! We could have gone to you so easily.”

"True," said the ancient one, shaking her head. "But you do not often come, my dear, and I could not wait longer. I near my end. The end of all this—" she finished vaguely, lifting her ebony cane and sweeping it around with a trembling arm. "So at last I said I would come myself and see you, and also divide my jewels amongst those here who are dear to me."

The gray elves tugged at the black box and the little princess helped the ancient fairy onward. The king and queen came now to meet them, and all stopped beneath the shadow of a great tree.

Queer green twisted chairs were scattered about. A sun-dial stood near pointing its finger eternally to the hours, and a fountain sent its rainbow spray high into the blue air. Below the terraced garden a lake sparkled as sharply as beaten silver in the late afternoon sun, and seven black swans swam slowly around it, and then slowly around again.

The ancient one was given the seat of honor beneath the shadowy tree, and the king and queen, the princess Jewelette and all the fairies of the court, gathered near her, while the gray elves sat cross-legged on the grass and watched,—which is what the gray elves always do when there is anything to watch.

After all had been served with nectar and am-

brosia—and honey and little white rolls, and when all the pleasant gossip of the court had been talked over, the ancient one lifted her ebony stick and beckoned to the gray elves who guarded the black box.

“Bring hither my treasure-chest!” she commanded in her quavering voice. “Bring it hither, and undo the lock. Prithee—be nimble!”

The gray elves did her bidding swiftly and the black cover of the silver-studded box was lifted.

All the fairies, even the king and queen and princess Jewelette, gave little cries of wonder and delight, for it was as if the sunbeams and moonbeams and dew-drops of a thousand years had been imprisoned in the black box and crystallized there into jems of flawless beauty.

And there were pearls that only fairies of the sea can find—pearls tinted like the white mist of dawn when the sun first shines through it,—and there were opals iridescent and mysterious—the wonder stones of the world. But strangest of all the jewels was a string of moonstones that wound in and out among the others, gleaming softly as moonlight on snow. For well they all knew that this string of moonstones held a magic none of the other jewels possessed, and brought to its wearer a charm which drew all hearts to her. Otherwise the necklace was of little value, for moonstones may

be picked up on the tropical seashore on any quiet night.

The ancient one lifted the jewels out, each lovely ornament by itself, and placed them upon a low table by her side. At last only the string of moonstones remained in the bottom of the box alone. There it shone faintly as though it were overlooked and forgotten.

The little princess gave one swift glance at the jewel-laden table, then turned and gazed down into the black box, the pink coming and going in her bewitching face, and her blue eyes growing dark as purple pansies.

After that one swift glance, she did not look at the table again,—though none seemed to notice this.

With trembling hands her godmother arranged the jewels to her liking, while all the court watched in silence.

“My dear ones,” she said at last, “the time has come for me to set my affairs in order, for soon—very soon—I depart. Only the God-of-All-Things knows whither I go, or how I shall return. These,” her old hands fluttering toward the gems, “I will need no more. Therefore it is my pleasure to divide them amongst those I love.”

“First, O beloved queen—take what you desire from those here beside me. Then His Royal

Highness is to choose, then my god-daughter; all the maids-of-honor are my friends, they are to choose next.—Ay! All are to choose what they will except the Lady Mayblossom whose grandmother was my dearest friend. For her I have chosen my own gift.”

The Lady Mayblossom, who was sweet as her name, crossed the lawn and stood beside the ancient one. Her eyes were misty with tears, for she dearly loved the fairy godmother.

A little tremor of expectancy now ran through the waiting group, and the gray elves who sat cross-legged on the grass and watched, bent forward, pricked up their pointed ears, and listened also. But they made no sound, for the gray elves are dumb.

“Approach, dear queen,” quavered the ancient one, “and take what you will from among my jewels!”

The queen stepped softly forward, bent her head and kissed the faded face of the old fairy.

“Why,” she said, “an you desire to have it, I will, dear godmother—though it hurts my heart to do so. Indeed, and truly, I will love whatever you give me in that it has belonged to you—and I will guard it well.” Then lightly, and as though the choice were of small moment, she chose a collar of pearls, and bowing again, withdrew.

The king then came forward smiling as though he would humor the fairy godmother in her whim.

From the table he took a ring of chased gold. It was heavy and unlovely, but it was a wishing-ring, and the king remembered hearing that one wish still remained within its magic power.

The ancient one smiled back at him, then slipped the ring on his finger herself.

"Wish wisely, dear friend!" she counseled. "Seven wishes had the ring to give, and six are gone. Not one has brought joy. Look you. I also still wear upon this palsied hand a wishing-ring given me long ago. He who gave it bade me not to part with it. Three wishes has it had to give. Two have I used, and they have brought me naught but grief. The third remains, but alas! I fear to use it. Therefore with the ring you have chosen, wish wisely; dear friend. Wish wisely!"

The fairy king laughed, and bent to kiss her hand.

"Peradventure I too shall fear to wish," he said. "But should I brave it out, I will remember your words, O kind one!"

Then the little princess drew near, her starry eyes shining, and her face dimpling with smiles.

"Choose, my love!" said her godmother. "The most beautiful of my jewels are still here."

The princess caught her breath quickly and

clasped her hands together. She glanced once again at the glittering array on the table, then turned to the open black box at the ancient one's feet, and without hesitation pointed into it with one rosy finger.

"I would have the string of moonstones, dear godmother," she said.

The old fairy rose from her chair slowly and steadied herself by the ebony cane. Her face changed from its tender serenity to a sternness that became terrifying.

"Perchance I did not hear aright," she answered after a moment's silence. "But if so, then hark ye! The moonstones are not for you, my child. Choose from the gems upon the table!"

The little princess opened her pansy dark eyes in wide astonishment, and drew herself up to her full height, with a certain gesture of disdain the fairy people of the court knew well.

"Not for me, dear godmother!" she replied with cold gentleness. "Then this being so, I decline your other jewels. But I pray you answer me of your graciousness; do you yourself wear the necklace of moonstones into that new country of change whither you journey soon?"

"Nay, verily!" returned the ancient one. "To fairy-land we come without jewels, and we leave it without them."

The princess nodded assent, and her face lost its color and grew white as snow.

"Then I implore you—give me the moonstones," she requested softly.

Her godmother leaned towards her, her hands folded on the crotch of the ebony cane.

"Little princess," she said, "of all my gems, I love the moonstones best, though they are of small worth save for the charm they bear. Also, of all my friends I loved best the grandmother of the Lady Mayblossom. For this reason—and others I care not to explain—I give the string of moonstones to the Lady Mayblossom."

Bending down, she lifted the necklace from the black box, and turning to the maid-of-honor who stood beside her, frightened, and as though ready to fly, the old fairy reached up and clasped the moonstones around her soft young throat.

The princess gazed as one not believing the evidence of her own senses.

The king and queen waited in tense silence. The fairies of the court stood poised as for flight; the gray elves sat cross-legged, all eyes, and ears, and eagerness.

Even the very birds stopped singing and the leaves of the great tree overhead hung motionless.

Then—as in a flash—the princess caught the

necklace of moonstones from the Lady Mayblossom's throat, threw it on the grass, and stamped her foot upon it, once! twice! thrice! The jewels crumbled or were crushed into the earth. Seeing them so, the princess laughed softly, but defiantly, and in the silence that followed, her words fell on the air without a tremor.

"So! So!" she said. "It is so I shall do to those who cross my will!"

The fairy queen covered her eyes with her hands. The king stood in silence, his face hardening. The little court fairies still were poised for flight—yet did not fly, and the gray elves sat cross-legged and watched, their goggle eyes staring wildly; and as they watched and listened, they shook like autumn leaves in the wind.

The Lady Mayblossom alone turned and fled.

The princess still stood, her foot upon the jewels, and the ancient fairy, leaning on the ebony cane, gazed at her fixedly.

Then she spoke, and her voice had lost its quavering tone and sounded young and strong again; while her eyes that had never grown old, shone bright in her old, old face. Slowly she lifted the ebony cane.

"Move not!" she commanded. "Move not—anyone—except my gray elves! Go you, O gray

elves, and bring hence a rose-plant that grows in a golden pot by the south gate of this garden. Bring it hither with care. Go! Be nimble!"

The six gray elves departed swiftly, and as swiftly returned. They bore a golden pot from which grew one tall rose-plant and they placed the pot at the ancient one's feet. Green was the rose-bush with many leaves, but no rose or bud grew upon it.

The ancient fairy glanced at the waiting court.

"Harken ye all!" she said in that ringing voice. "You have seen what you have seen, and heard what you have heard. See and hear further. One and all you know that again the princess Jewelette has shown that her heart was to-day dominated by love of self—and love of self only. Now Love we must all have in some form.

"Through love of others we grow to be like the God-of-All-Things. Through love of self we grow to be unlike Him. That, my children, is to change little by little to what is evil.

"So little by little your princess is losing from her heart all love but that of self. Yet Hope is not yet gone. I would save her, my children, and to save her she must be made to suffer; and she must learn to love another better than herself.

"One wish remains in this old, old ring of mine. With it I will turn her into a rose. But it will be

a rose enchanted. In the heart of it will be held a drop of magic perfume. The leaves around the golden heart of the rose will be folded so closely this perfume cannot escape unless the flower itself so wills; and while the perfume is held there, the rose will live on, and never fade. Should it let the magic essence sweeten the air—it will swiftly die. What may happen after, I know not; but in this matter I must not falter, but deal with her only for her spirit's good."

Raising her ebony cane, the ancient fairy looked around the assembled group. No one had dared to move, or question her, yet fear whitened every face.

The queen clung to the king's arm, and the king was as immovable as though under a spell. The little court fairies seemed about to fly, yet did not; and the cross-legged gray elves gazed at the scene with unblinking goggle eyes.

The princess alone stood as before, disdain and anger in every line of her face and figure. In the shadow of the great tree she still seemed enfolded by the afternoon light and color.

Not for a moment had she thought of asking for pity, even if she believed her godmother would carry out her dire threat. She alone amongst them all looked quite unafraid.

The ancient one paused as though waiting for

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some word of repentance or supplication—some littlest word.

There was only a dread silence in all the king's garden.

Then slowly the black cane swung through the air—once—twice—three times. A sudden darkness fell, as though the sun had been snuffed out like a candle.

A roll of thunder followed, and after that, slowly, slowly, the light came back. From a soft gray it grew into the radiance of afternoon. The birds were again singing in the garden, and a light wind ruffled the leaves.

All the fairies stood as before on the green beneath the great tree—all but the little princess Jewelette. She was no longer there, but on the rose-bush in the golden pot bloomed a marvelous rose, not yet quite blown; a red, red, red rose of perfect beauty.

The fairy queen slipped down to earth in a deadly faint, and they carried her away to the castle. The fairies, so long undetermined whether to go or stay, lifted their silvery wings and flew in every direction. The king stood, as still spell-bound, while the gray elves rose from the grass and clustered together.

"Hither!" the ancient one called to them.

"Hither, my good gray elves! Lock again my jewels in the black box! Take it and drop it into yonder lake where the water is deepest. Then return. Be nimble! Be nimble!"

They did her bidding and returned.

"Hasten once more!" she said to them. "Hasten! Lift the golden pot wherein grows the rose-plant with its one blossom, and bear it to the garden of the great and lonely king who reigns over the first, and most troublesome kingdom of mortals, beyond the river bounding the land of fairies. Leave your burden within the stone wall of his garden close by the bridle path and near the great gate that opens to the high road."

As she spoke her voice changed, quavered, and grew old. Yet the king, listening, heard each word. He saw the gray elves lift the golden pot and fly away with it. Powerless to detain them, silent as though under a spell, he watched until they disappeared in the blue of the air.

The ancient fairy sank into her twisted green chair. Folding her withered hands on the crotch of her stick, she leaned her chin upon them. Her strangely young eyes gazed out over the king's sunlit garden; gazed long and lovingly. Then she closed them.

The king came close to her and called her by

name. Again he called her, and his voice was shaken and very sad. When she did not answer he stooped and looked into her old, old face, and then he saw she had departed to the land where all things are made new.

PART II

Up and over the garden of the fairy king flew the six gray elves bearing between them the golden earth-filled pot from which grew the wonderful rose-bush.

On and on they flew making signs now and then to each other, and gazing intently down on the country with their great goggle eyes in search of the land-marks that were to guide them.

It was a long journey, but their gray wings did not easily tire, and they were always faithful to the orders of their mistress. Now, though they were troubled and very sad, for each one of them had adored the little princess, even with all her willful ways and selfishness, they deeply regretted the magic that had in the twinkling of an eye turned her into a flower.

Dumbly they communicated this to each other, and their eyes filled with tears when they rested for a moment on the exquisite red rose.

It did not seem to them that the punishment

fitted the fault for which it was given. If the princess Jewelette had desired the string of moon-stones, they thought she should have had them. It was for her to choose, and others to give up—to their way of thinking.

Beautiful as the Lady Mayblossom was, she was not to be compared to the fairy king's little daughter. She seemed made of snow and peach-bloom, and her hair was like copper spun fine as cob-web. Always when the elves looked at the princess, this red-gold hair had dazzled them, and they—so devoid of color, so like the gray fog and the gray clouds, and the gray river-mist, that they could easily be lost in any one of them—worshipped her as long ago mortals worshipped the sun.

Therefore they flew onward with something almost like anger in their hearts. But they were good elves and struggled to overcome this feeling, knowing how just their ancient mistress had always been. For long years she had given herself to deeds that brought only blessings to mortals and fairies and also little gray elves as well.

Onward they flew until the sun rolled down behind the hills and into the sea.

Then the river that divided the fairy country from that of mortals came in sight, gleaming across the twilight land like a silver embroidery.

As the moon rose, they flew over this river, and now in the country of mortals, the King's Palace and wide court garden appeared. The garden was walled by cemented stones of red and green and violet, and at intervals, stone dragons with faces set and fierce kept perpetual watch and ward upon it. In the moonlight these looked like living things, and the elves shuddered as they flew, for never before had they been beyond the river boundary.

They flew with fast beating hearts to the great gates of the wall. Here the dragons set in the side pillars were more fearsome than any of the others, for their eyes were lit with red lights and their wings seemed lifted for flight.

The gray elves looked about in dumb terror; but the orders of their mistress were imperative, and the golden pot with the rose-bush must be set within the garden.

With a last wild effort of strength and courage they darted over the wall, found the path and gently lowered their burden beside it.

The light of the full moon touched the half-blown rose to almost unearthly beauty, and the golden pot shone against the grass as though the sun had left a spot of brightness there.

The gray elves turned their big troubled eyes around the unfamiliar garden and then back to the

rose-bush. It seemed to them dreadfully lonely in this unknown land.

Yet they could not discover that it looked strange or out of place. No—it was just an ordinary rose-bush bearing a red blossom of unusual beauty, as far as anyone could see. Still their hearts misgave them, and they would gladly have carried the golden pot back the way they came.

But they were still loyal to their old beloved mistress and knew they must leave the little lovely rose-princess to her fate. So one by one they climbed up the rose branches, for the gray elves are small and light in weight as moonbeams, though they are strong to lift and carry. One by one they reached up and touched the rose with their tiny pointed hands, gazing at it with dumb longing. They leaned their faces downward, then shook their heads to one another. “No!” “No!” There was no perfume. By signs they spoke to the rose and bade her hold the magic essence fast; never to let it escape at dawn—or dark, or in the light of the sun or moon, for that meant death.

Passionately they warned her of this impending tragedy—this desperate peril! They tried also to comfort her by saying in pantomime that some day her godmother might send them to bear her home again, and lift the enchantment that bound her. They strove to remind her of the wishing-ring her

father the king had chosen; for though the ring had no power in the land of mortals unless used there, yet he might find his way across the boundary river.

But alas, this thought gave them little hope, for although the fairies were permitted to enter many countries, to this one, only, the elves so far had found the road.

The mortal king's garden was sweet and still and scented by innumerable night-flowering trees. Here and there a bird made restless by the vivid moonlight sang a few sleepy notes. A fountain played ceaselessly, and the sound of the falling water was like a lullaby.

The little elves would gladly have curled down under the rose leaves and gone to sleep, but the night was slipping away, they had performed their mission, and must return with word of its accomplishment.

With many sighs they lifted their gauzy wings and flew away toward the fairy country; so the rose-bush was left without friends in the wonderful garden.

The wind before dawn blew over its green leaves and the red flower swayed back and forth. At earliest light a humming-bird darted around and around it as though seeking for some sweetness, and finding none.

Then came the head gardener and looked the plant over as though puzzled. He examined it with minute care through his big horn-rimmed spectacles and shook his frosted head—for he was a very old gardener.

“Where be thee come from?” he questioned, for he always talked to his flowers.

“Where be thee come from, thou pretty thing? Art some gift-plant a lady ha’ sent His Majesty? Ay! Ay! that be likely,” he laughed softly. “Pretty thing—pretty thing,” he repeated, “there be no lady half as lovely as thee—else had my royal master wed long ago. None so lovely as thee I warrant—nor half so sweet.” Bending down he almost touched the rose with his old wrinkled face; “nor half so sweet,” he said again dreamily. Then lifted his head and looked puzzled. “Why”—nodding—“why, bless me, pretty one, thou ’ast no scent! No scent at all—an I be keen to catch the scent o’ roses! What now—what now?—Hath a moth robbed thee, or one o’ those long-beaked hummers?” He rubbed his white head and ruminated, then went along with his basket of tools.

“’Tis none o’ my affair,” he soliloquized. “I’ll let it be, gold pot an’ all. But a rose wi’out scent, she be not a rose, say I. She be not a rose. I would na ha’ such in my rose-garden. I must let be—let be, though. But give me a rose wid scent,

say I, even if it be a common hedge-rose, or a cinnamon bud, small as a button—ay! I'd sooner ha' a road-side briar sweet-scented than yonder beauty. A rose without sweetness—she be like a woman wi'out love in her heart.—Ay! Ay!"

Muttering to himself, he went his way among the flower-beds.

Sunlight flooded the garden at high noon and it was a place filled with life and music. Butterflies hovered over the rose-bush—then left it. The bees hesitated on their flight near it, then passed by. A white moth touched it fleetingly; and none of these returned.

Only the sunlight seemed to abide with it,—the sunlight common to all.

By and by a group of courtiers strolling gayly past noticed the rose-plant in the golden pot, for no flowers had hitherto grown near the bridle path.

"Heigh-ho!" sang out one young cavalier. "By St. Elizabeth, the lady of roses, in truth here is the pick of them all! His Majesty must be growing extravagant when he has his bushes potted in gold! Methinks I will clip the blossom—I know one could wear it most charmingly in her hair. A red rose 'gainst such raven hair, as I know of—well, 'tis beyond words to paint the picture!"

He touched the stem of the rose and was about

to break it when one of the little court ladies stayed his arm.

"Nay! Do not pluck it, my lord!" she exclaimed warningly. "I have a presentiment that the king would not have it touched! See! It is a most rare blossom; and after all, it belongs to His Majesty."

The cavalier laughed. "Here's a to-do!" he said. "What is one rose more or less, sweetheart! Here to-day—gone to-morrow! 'Gather ye roses while ye may,' some poet hath said. The leaves of this one will be scattered on the bridle path ere two moonlit nights go by."

"Not so!" she answered. "It is but half-blown. 'Twill live a week." Then she leaned down to it. "Why, prithee," she cried, "it hath no perfume! Now, my lord," laughingly, "you will be content to leave it. There are a thousand scented blossoms growing in the rose-garden free for your taking."

He frowned and tweaked his small mustache. "I desire what I desire," he said. "If I desire a scentless rose, 'tis my own affair. This is the one I would have, and I shall proceed to pluck it."

The little maid-of-honor spread out her brocade skirts and stood before the rose-bush.

"Thou shalt not! Thou shalt not!" she cried defiantly. "'Tis the king's rose and very specially set in this golden pot."

"With all deference to you, dear lady," he returned, bowing low, "I most certainly shall—golden pot or no!"

So saying, he swung her lightly to one side and caught the rose stem to break it, but one of the thorns went deeply into his thumb, and he shook his hand free angrily.

The little maid laughed with much delight, and stepping again between him and the golden pot, danced lightly before it.

"Little torment!" he muttered. "The mischief is in you, and a devil in this rose-bush! I have pierced my thumb to the quick, and will not be able to touch my guitar this evening. I gainsay the dastardly thorn hath run through a nerve, for it throbs to the elbow."

At this the maid-of-honor went into a perfect gale of merriment. "Alack! Alack!" she cried. "Call the court-surgeon! My Lord Harry hath stabbed himself with a rose-prickle!" So making merry at his expense, she caught her flowered gown over her arm and ran after the others, leaving the young cavalier to follow sullenly after.

When the sound of their voices had died away the rose-bush was alone again.

"Was it always to be so?" she thought. "Would everything pass by and leave her?" She longed even for the summer breeze to keep her company—

to stir her crimson leaves, and sway the green bush of which she seemed to be a living part. For most strange of all, the princess Jewelette, though changed to a rose, in some magic way was still the little princess, and by a mystic power could see and hear and feel and think, even as she had at her father's court. But she could express nothing; no power was given to let any know of the enchantment that had befallen her.

Again and again in spirit she lived over the fatal hour in the garden, and traced each action that led up to the moment her godmother had so deliberately wrought her doom. Most horrible indeed it seemed to her, and fear and loneliness took up their abode in her heart.

Beautiful she knew she was as a rose; but only a rose, a thing plucked for anyone's pleasure, perchance, or to be torn by the wind and beaten by the rain as must surely follow should she outlast the summer. She shuddered as she pictured her fate.

Then slowly the balm of memory came to her. Her godmother had promised that while the magic perfume was held in her golden heart, she would not die. Some small comfort crept through her. Little by little the trembling that shook her red leaves ceased.

"But to what end should she live?" she ques-

tioned. "Everyone and everything passed by. One rose in a great garden. Who would care if it lived or died? And a rose without perfume was a disappointment. None would desire it except for a whim, as the young cavalier had. The bees and butterflies and humming-birds would all leave it untouched."

No man or maid would give it a second thought once they had discovered it was scentless. The old gardener had been right. It was better to be a common hedge-rose that smelled sweet or a highway briar that perfumed the air for tired travelers.

True, there was the perfume locked under her curled leaves—but that she must hold fast. Death followed if she set it free. Her godmother had said so. The gray elves knew, and they had warned her. She must hold the perfume very fast. If none plucked her from the stem, and the wind and rain did not loosen her crimson leaves—perhaps—perhaps, she thought, the king her father would come with his wondrous wishing-ring that could turn her back into her own beautiful self! With the desperation of despair she clung to this thought. Then came another; she remembered that none of her people had ever, ever found their way across the boundary river to this country. To other countries they had often gone—but they had been warned not to cross the river to this one.

Black grief filled her heart. There was no way out of it all, she thought,—no way, no way. Memories of her willfulness, her unutterable selfishness, her constant haughtiness, haunted her as out of a mist of pain. This was indeed punishment for all her selfish deeds; but a punishment greater, it seemed, than she could bear.

At last one thought only dominated her and it was that she must hide and cling to the magic perfume or she would die. For if she lived on help might come. Her father would not forget—and the gray elves would entreat her fairy godmother to break the spell of enchantment.

Mortals she did not fear so greatly, for the rose branches were beset with thorns, but the high wind and the pitiless rain and the hot sun of noonday—these filled her with dread unspeakable.

Noon passed and the flowers in the garden grew drowsy in the quivering heat.

No one came by—for there were many other roadways and gates, and none would take the bridle path when the sun was high.

After the merry court at her father's palace this was desolation to the little rose-princess. A very passion of homesickness swept over her. She longed for anyone she knew, even the dumb gray elves,—when, faintly, and far off she heard the sound of horses' hoofs upon the beaten path. A

faint interest stirred her, for the hours had been so long and monotonous.

Soon a man dressed in black came in sight riding a great black horse, and beside him rode a woman with snow-white hair; but none could tell her age for her eyes were so merry and bright.

Behind these riders came two little grooms who looked bored and preoccupied with their own affairs. They rode gray ponies, and were dressed in gay colored cordovan leather jerkins, and leggings laced with silver cord and thick-set with loose-sewn silver buttons, that jingled like little bells.

The rose wondered who the man upon the great black horse could be. He filled her with awe, he was so grave and dark and strong. Mortals were new to her, and this one was not at all like the merry ladies and gentlemen who had passed in the morning. They were not so different, except in size, from the folk of her own father's court. But no two could be more different than the cavalier who pricked his thumb and this man upon the black horse. The grooms were simply grooms such as might be anywhere, she thought; but the woman with her white hair and sparkling eyes was different again from any she had seen.

She wondered about her also, and listened intently to the sound of their pleasant voices as they drew slowly near. When a word drifted to her she

understood it, as she had the words of the gardener and the little court-maid and the cavalier.

Of this she was very thankful, and she hoped they would not pass without seeing her. She longed to have them stop if only for a moment, for the garden was so wide and lonesome.

She had forgotten she was a rose, until the riders were close beside her, and she heard the woman's voice speaking eagerly. "Look, my son!" she exclaimed. "How lovely a thing! Saw you ever such a perfect rose? Yet what extravagance to set a carven gold-pot beside the bridle path! It is quite lost," she laughed. "But in truth the rose is worth it—it is a very marvel! I must dismount and breathe its fragrance!"

"Nay, my mother," the man answered, "it shall be brought to you."

He beckoned to a groom. "The queen desires yonder rose," he said; "pluck it carefully, and strip it of thorns."

The groom bowed, and turned to obey, but the queen-mother checked him. "No! No!" she commanded. "With all the thanks in the world, my son,—I will not have it plucked. But I would see it closer. Bring hither the golden pot."

The groom sprang to obey, and brought the rose-bush to the queen's side. She bent down from her horse, lifting the blossom to her face. Pres-

ently she looked up with a little smile and shook her head.

"It is without perfume," she said, "quite without. How disappointing in so wondrous a rose!" Then to the groom: "Take the plant away."

The dark man smiled also. "You are mistaken perhaps, mother mine—the rose is only half-blown, you see." She shook her head again.

"'Tis but a small matter, Your Majesty, but I am right. It has no vestige of sweetness."

"Bring me the plant," the king said to the groom.

The golden pot was lifted again, and the king drew the rose towards him. "In truth you are right," he assented. "It has no sweetness, but instead is beset with most villainous thorns! A rose without perfume is like a woman without a soul, methinks. Yet withal, this is a rare and lovely thing. Wilt change thy mind and have it?"

"No, dear heart," she refused. "I would rather have a bramble that were sweet. Perchance I am fondest of pansies after all. They look up at me and remind me of children—here in this great garden where are no faces so innocent."

The king frowned. "We need no children in the palace garden, my mother," he returned. "The times are full of peril on land and sea. My nights and days are overfilled with anxieties for the State—and thee. We need no children."

The queen-mother sighed, then turned the subject lightly.

"Well, prithee, 'tis a rare flower, and a costly pot. Who could have brought it hither so far from the rose-garden?"

"Perchance I have a friend I know not of," the king answered absently. "Of givers of gifts there is no end." So speaking, they passed through the gates and the rose was again left alone.

"The king!" she thought, "so that was the mortal king—of a land of mortals! Of a certainty he was good to look upon—though one would not think to find a king so grave and troubled."

The queen-mother had more of youth in her eyes and smile than he.

Was that the way, she wondered, of kings in this new land? No one in the fairy country showed such weariness. What could these perilous times be; what the heavy cares of State? A feeling of pity stirred within her golden heart, as she thought on and on.

"That a king should look so sorrowful," she sighed. "What then was the use of being ruler over a country of mortals? Strange that his eyes were so grave in his young face—strange the note of bitterness in his voice. Why should there be no need of children in the garden; what could befall them but joy?" It was all a puzzle to the rose-

princess, and it took her thoughts away from her own doleful fate.

All through the late afternoon, on through the tinted twilight—on into the moonlit night, she wondered and wondered about the young king, and sighed and pitied him. She forgot even to be lonely, though the birds and butterflies were asleep and only the flitter-mice, the lantern-eyed owls, and other fly-by-nights were abroad. Indeed, as dawn drew near she had forgotten to grieve over her own sorrows, and only thought of his.

His words haunted her. "A rose without perfume," he had said, "is like a woman without a soul." Such words should have angered her perhaps, but they did not, for she was not a rose without perfume.

Remembering this, she folded the leaves still closer about her heart. Death—death would follow should the sweetness escape. Then should the king ride by to-morrow, he would see only a withered flower upon the stalk, or a scatter of red leaves on the bridle path. There might be a scent of attar-of-rose on the air—nothing else. She shuddered and shuddered but as the night had been long, grew drowsy and slept as flowers sleep.

A week went by, a week of sultry heat, then one morning the old gardener came.

"Thou art a long-lived rose, my pretty," he said, pausing. "A long-lived rose. But the wind will blow up, and the rains will come. Roses be like joys, my pretty. They last not long."

So he tottered away. More and more lonely grew the little rose-princess. Over and over she counted the sum of her selfish deeds in fairy-land, and regretted them. For she had come now to know both sorrow and regret. Through all these intolerable hours she watched for the young king and thought of his grave face, but he did not pass, and the memory grew to be like a dream.

On the eighth morning, though, he came, one of the gay grooms riding behind. The rose heard the jingling of the silver buttons before they came in sight.

His Majesty was in black as before, and rode slowly on his great black horse, for the day was warm. They had almost passed the rose-bush when the king spoke.

"How many days have gone since we took the bridle path with the queen?" he asked.

"Eight days, Your Majesty," replied the small groom.

"Eight days! And the rose on yonder bush still blooms!" the king exclaimed. "Surely 'tis not the same blossom, Nicholas?"

"The very same, Your Majesty," he answered. "I noticed there was no other bud on all the plant but this alone on the topmost branch."

"Strange," said the young king. "Eight days, Nicholas, is long life for a rose. But there was something about the blossom, we remarked,—yes, yes, I remember, it was scentless, and my mother would have none of it. Women are like that, and I myself care not for such roses in my garden." So saying, he rode away, the jingling groom following.

A great desolation swept over the little princess-rose as they went.

"He cared not for such in his garden! Oh, if he only knew!" she thought, "if he only knew!" If she could but find a way to tell him. But there was no such way. Everything passed because she had no sweetness. Almost she wished she were a cinnamon rose, or a briar; then perchance the king would have broken her from the stem and fastened her on his doublet and worn her away. Yet she scorned herself for the thought. She a princess!—Truly a princess, though enchanted. For a little only pride and anger filled her heart. Then she was left again to loneliness and these things passed away.

Day after day went by, and now she had come to watch the bridle path hour by hour for the dark

figure on the great black horse. Hour by hour she listened for the jingling buttons of the little groom.

And again one morning of sunshine they came.

This time the king drew his horse up suddenly beside the rose-bush.

"Now, by Flora, the goddess of all flowers!" he exclaimed, "but this is past belief! The scentless rose still blooms, Nicholas! How many days since we took this path before?"

"Eight days, Your Majesty," returned the little groom.

"Sixteen in all since my mother rode here with me then," said the king, "and still but half-blown! Dismount and bring hither the golden pot, Nicholas."

The princess-rose trembled with excitement. "What next?" she thought, "what next?"

The king leaned down and touched the flower. "Unscented still," he said, "but of a rare beauty. I will have this golden pot and plant taken to the room-of-books in the palace, Nicholas. Call the gardener."

The old man came, pulling his forelock of white hair.

"A strange rose, this, Bellman," said the king, "and one that knows not the time to die. Have it taken to the palace."

"Ay! Your Majesty," the old man answered. "It be a rare queer rose, as you say. I see all things in thy garden, but never have I seen bird or bee or moth or butterfly stop near her. It seems a friendless thing, to these old eyes, and be-likes is lonely."

"Lonely!" echoed the king, "then I should indeed have it taken to my palace. Loneliness reigns there, Bellman, for all the court."

"Is not thy Mother with thee—my Master?" questioned the gardener.

"She is there, Bellman, but is ill since yester eve. My brothers are at enmity with us, as you who have known us always, have heard. The friend I love best has been lately killed in battle—and peace has not yet come. Much I envy you your days of peace here in the garden. But we must ride on. So good morrow to you, old friend."

The rose listened until the last sound died away.

Then came an under-gardener and carried the golden pot and rose-bush to the palace. Afterwards an unbending footman placed them by a window in the room-of-books. It was a quiet room and filled with a golden gloom. Books lined the walls from floor to ceiling. There was no other flower in all the place and the red rose shone like a flame in the soft light.

A gladness flooded her heart, and though the

room was more quiet than the garden, and there was no one in it, she was no longer lonely. For this was the king's palace, and sooner or later he would return to it. She listened for his step and watched for him.

By and by he came, and seeing the flower, went over to it and lifted the half-blown bud.

"Most lovely thing," he said. "Whence have you this power to live?—Dost not know you have out-stayed your time?—Art perchance a rose of Heaven—blown by chance on earth, and therefore fadeless? No. Not so. The roses of Heaven would be sweet of perfume."

Night came but the rose was not afraid, for she thought of the king's words and waited for him to return.

Time went on, and always when His Majesty entered the room-of-books he stopped by the rose and marveled at it.

"So lovely still!" he said one morning. "Not one petal dropped! Give me your secret, little rose, that I may keep eternal youth. And yet—no! I have no youth to keep, though my years are not many. Wars and the rumors of wars age me. Strife in the court, the jealousy of my brothers, the illness of my beloved mother, all these take the joy out of life. If I knew love—such love as one dreams of; but no, again. There is no beauty in

all my court I could so love. They are like you—little rose. Everyone like you. They lack sweetness,—soul. The nameless something without which they are worthless.

“If you had been sweet, little rose, you would have been plucked long ere this. Ay—plucked and carried to the queen, for by my faith, never was there so bewitching a flower!”

Again he went away, and through all the hours that followed the rose-princess listened only for his step.

But there came a day of mourning to the palace, when it was hushed, and no slightest sound of mirth by hall or stair drifted into the room-of-books, as it so often did. No one of all the courtiers came and wondered at her lasting bloom. For often now they came and wondered at her; old scientists and philosophers; wise men of diverse cults, alchemists, and theorists, as well as the young and frivolous courtiers. The rose had become the fashion of the hour as a topic and diversion, and all knew of her beauty. But by the king's order no lightest touch was to be laid upon the plant in the golden pot.

To-day though, no one entered the room-of-books except a little page to fetch a breviary, and he was garbed most dolefully in black from head to toe.

Having got the book, curiosity took him over to the flower.

"Queer little thing!" he said as though half-afraid. "All the court is guessing about thee! I myself think thou art enchanted, and if I could steal one crimson leaf and wear it upon my heart I never would grow old either. But that would not suit me to remain as I am. I would be a man. 'Tis hateful to be young and sent hither and thither at the whim of a maid-of-honor, and then, peradventure ha' one's ears boxed at any mischance. Truly I desire to be a man speedily. But hark you, sweet one,—I want not to grow ancient! Nay, verily! Nor to die. I like not the aspect of death. I like it not at all. Heed you, little rose. The queen-mother is dead, and to be entombed to-morrow. And she was not so ancient, and was of a merry heart withal. Yet she is dead," he shivered a little. "In the chapel she lies in state. To lie in state is a sorry business, lovely rose. Sooner would I be a page and alive!"

So he left the room, peering fearfully around, for the place was full of shadows.

The little rose was alone again, but she had now no thoughts for herself, nor any self-pity. All her thoughts were with the young king. It was the weight of his loneliness that hurt her, and she only felt his sorrow.

At noon the next day a bell began tolling. One by one the solemn, heavy sounds fell, setting the air a-quiver. The rose shuddered as she heard them.

"She is dead!" the bell said. "She is dead!—is dead! She is dead!" over and over and over again.

"To be dead," thought the little rose. "Why was it to be so feared? Did they not say in her own country that no fairy died but only changed?—Yet, what was this change? Who could tell? Her godmother had warned her to hold fast the magic perfume, or she would die."

Fear possessed her. She remembered the face of the little page when he had told of the queen's lying-in-state.

And as she thought, the door of the room-of-books opened, and the king entered. There was no change at all in his garments, for he ever wore black, but his young face was like carven ivory.

He walked up and down the long room—up and down. Presently he stopped beside the rose-bush, and stood looking at the crimson flower.

"Wonderful!" he said at last. "Most wonderful of all things I have seen! A deathless rose in this world of death. Yet who would wish to live long?" He shook his head and smiled a little. "I can think of but one thing that would detain me, willingly,—I would know love before I pass on."

Then he shrugged his shoulders as at a fancy. "To be a king—and yet have bestowed upon one the gift of true love also. 'Tis too much to ask of Fate."

Again he paced the floor and again paused by the flower. This time he touched it lightly.

"O beautiful—most beautiful!" he repeated. "If you were only sweet! Then I would to-day carry you to my mother as my last gift. She lies in such lonely grandeur, little rose. Methinks you might even yet bring her some comfort. The great wreaths and arches of white flowers—the mourning tokens—seem not to belong to her at all."

The rose looked into the face above her and trembled. Suddenly she understood that the hour had come when there was but one thing left for her to do. She must set the magic perfume free to sweeten the air, since the king wished it.

Then she would be carried to the dead queen and laid in her hand—and afterwards there would be no more—no more of all that she had known.

Yet strangely now, she felt no fear. A warm wind blew in through the window. The rose bent before it and the red leaves uncurled. It blew again, and the rose unlocked the leaves about her heart. In a moment a heavenly sweetness floated through the room-of-books.

With a cry of astonishment the young king

looked about. "'Tis passing strange!" he said. "The air is turning golden, and sparkles as with broken stars! Now 'tis filled with incense! The perfume of Araby—or the wind from over a thousand gardens!"

Then he remembered the plant in the golden pot.

"The rose! the rose!" he exclaimed. "It is the deathless flower of all the world that hath unsealed its balm! O lovely rose, I will carry you to the queen and you will give her joy even yet."

He lifted the rose to his lips and kissed its petals, but even as he touched them, they curled at the edges and their color faded. One loosened and fell to the floor; then another.

The king gazed in sorrowful amazement at the change. As still another leaf fluttered to his feet a soft darkness crept over the room-of-books. Deeper and denser it grew until it was like the Egyptian dark of old. A peal of thunder followed, that shook the very palace.

Afterwards light and silence came back, little by little, until sunshine flooded the place.

The king stood as before, his hand about the rose. He had not broken it from the stem, yet the leaves were still withering fast. But more strange than even this—beside the king stood one as kingly as himself—only he was fairy small! His robes glittered with gold and silver embroidery and many

colored gems, and upon his head was a crown.

“O mortal king!” he said, bowing deeply, “I come from a land you know not beyond the last river. Far have I searched for the flower you hold—that I might bear it home. Only now, within this last moment have I found my way hither, and now methinks I have come too late. It is not a rose you hold, O mortal king, but a princess of fairyland who is enchanted. The ancient and wise one who so enchanted her has departed to another life—and alas! the charm has worked out to this dire conclusion.

“In the heart of the rose was hidden a magic perfume. While the leaves held it fast, she lived, but if she gave the perfume to the air—death was her portion.”

The young king looked steadily upon the withering flower from which the leaves still fell.

“Alas!” he said. “I am unacquainted with the ways of fairyland. The ways of my own troubled country are often beyond my power of understanding; yet it seems this little rose—and none other was e’er so lovely—gave her sweetness to me, and brought death to herself thereby. Would, O Fairy king, that I had power to return life to one so dear.”

The fairy king lifted his hand on which was a dull gold ring.

"O mortal majesty!" he replied. "The fairy who placed this enchantment of the rose upon the little princess, gave also to me this wishing-ring. It is yet potent to grant one wish of the three it once could give. Only harm has come of it before. Now we will see what remains. Hold fast thy withering flower and I will wish upon the fairy's ring!"

Slowly the golden light faded again from the room, and deep darkness fell. Then the voice of the fairy king sounded in the stillness.

"O ancient ring!" he said. "Grant me the one last wish in thy keeping! I wish that the rose-princess be restored to life!"

Once more came the rolling thunder, and the soft return of the sunlight.

The dazzling fairy king had vanished as he came, but in the room-of-books stood the young king as before. His hand touched no fading rose on the top branch of the green bush in the golden pot,—for there was no blossom of any kind there: only beside him was surely the loveliest princess in all the whole world! A mortal princess!

Her eyes were dark as purple pansies and her face colored like the apple blooms of May. She wore a gown silvery as cobwebs on the grass at dawn, but not a jewel decked her beauty anywhere. The red-gold of her hair floated about her and



"Verily—yes, sweetheart," he answered, "we will go into the garden."

dazzled the young king's eyes, as in the other days the eyes of the little gray elves used to be dazzled by it.

She looked up into his face and smiled happily.

"O lovely princess!" he cried. "From what far country have you come? I pray you tell me! I pray you tell me!"

"Nay—I know not," she answered as one bewildered. "But what matter? I seem to have come over a long road—and all the way I have been watching for you—yes—all the way!"

"And I too," he said, taking her hand, "have come over a long road, and have been looking for you, my princess."

"Come!" she said. "There is a scent of roses on the air. Let us go out into the garden!"

"Verily—yes, sweetheart," he answered. "We will go into the garden. But first, first"—and a mist dimmed his eyes—"I must take you to one who sleeps. Her dreams will be sweeter afterwards."

So hand-in-hand they went out of the room-of-books, taking all for granted as well as each other, and asking no unanswerable questions of life, for this is the old fond way of all true lovers.

THE GARGOYLE AND THE GRIFFIN

LITTLE-GIRL walked very slowly through the grass toward the sun-dial to see what time it was. Once she stopped to pick a dandelion gone to seed, and blew the puff-ball, thinking it might tell her the hour, but after blowing thirteen times, only to find some pins of fluff still standing stiffly on the whitey-green pincushion, she gave it up and went on to the dial.

When she had decided that it was half-past three, she walked slowly back to the house, swinging her pink sunbonnet, and then sat down on the stone steps close to the gargoyle.

Usually, Little-girl skipped and ran, or hopped and danced, but to-day she did not do any of these things, for it was so still and hot in the garden, and so lonesome.

Little-girl had often noticed this lonesomeness at night. It would come creeping through the rooms like a gray fog, after she had gone to bed, and Mammy had snuffed out the candle. It was there when she woke up in the middle of the darkness and heard the rain pattering on the roof, and the wind

rattling at the doors and crying to be let in; but it did not often come in the daytime to the garden.

Under the magnolia trees an old peacock walked in solitary state, trailing his emerald and bronze tail. Now and then he paused to set his feathers a-quiver, and to call fiercely that it was going to rain; but the child paid no attention to him, for that was what he always called.

The sunlight sifted through the red silken cups of the poppies that edged the walk, and they dazzled Little-girl's eyes so that she looked away and over the restful green of the lawn.

A broken fountain stood near the dial, with a figure of Pan among the reeds for its center-piece. The child sighed, thinking how beautiful it would be to have a glittering spray of water raining up into the air, and then raining down again, with a cool splash against the basin. The brown, dusty figure with the pipes held against his silent lips, wearied, yet fascinated her.

Then she watched the grasshoppers play their long game of hide-and-seek, and listened to the katydids that suddenly broke out into argument in the big locust trees overhead, and as suddenly stopped. From the straw hives along the garden wall where the hollyhocks grew, came a low murmuring like the very far-off sound of the sea. Little-girl had never heard the sea.

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It had all been just like this so many, many mid-summer afternoons. At this hour, always, Granny went to sleep in the darkened parlor, and old Mammy nodded in her chair on the back porch. The shadow finger crept around the sun-dial; Pan blew soundlessly upon his reeds, and the heat shook itself free of the earth, and broke the air into tiny hot waves. But it seemed to Little-girl that to-day the griffin and the gargoyle watched her. The griffin was carven in marble, and rested majestically upon the side of the steps. His wings made a sort of balustrade, very helpful to hold by in slippery weather. One could also sit on his back. The gargoyle finished off the spout of the water-pipe that ran down the side of the house close by the steps, and he was made of gray stone.

His day of usefulness had some time ceased, for the water-pipe, like the fountain, was hopelessly broken, and when it rained nowadays the rain dripped in around the windows, leaked down through the roof, and sent small rivers everywhere but along the pipe and through his open mouth.

The gargoyle had never appeared to trouble about this, nor had he at any time changed his expression, that Little-girl could remember. Now, though, undoubtedly, there was something about him out of the common. The child gazed at him attentively, and wonderingly, and then looked up

at the griffin, for he also in a subtle, indefinite fashion was stirred out of his usual calm. Once he certainly tried to wink at her, and opened his beak, and when she moved quickly away further along the step, glancing back at the gargoyle to see if he had noticed—the gargoyle goggled his eyes, and distinctly smiled.

It was a wide and continuous smile, whole-souled and kind, but not becoming. Little-girl did not like to hurt his feelings by telling him so, and she waited to see if he would stop. After a few minutes she shook her yellow head gently at him.

"Oh! Please don't," she said, rather uncomfortably.

"Don't what?" inquired the gargoyle. "Prithee, don't what, my dear?"

"Don't smile," said Little-girl, coloring a bright pink. "Not so much, at least; I like you best plain."

A crackling laugh came suddenly from the griffin, that seemed to rend him within.

"Dear me! I wish you wouldn't either!" exclaimed Little-girl gently, turning to him. "It doesn't sound natural, some way."

"But it's so funny, you know," gasped the griffin. "So extremely funny! Oh! Marcus Agrippa! You like him best *plain*! Now, I, for instance, would prefer him *beautiful*!"

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"Of course," returned Little-girl, an indignant tremble in her voice, "I couldn't expect you to understand. I meant I like him best just as he has always been—with his *usual* face."

The griffin roared again, with even more crackling as of concealed fireworks.

"My, my!" he said at last, wiping his eyes, "the more I think of it, the funnier it gets. It's the best I've heard for years."

Little-girl regarded him with displeasure. "He smiles quite as nicely as you laugh," she answered. "You sounded exactly as though you were breaking."

"Perhaps I did overdo it," he agreed. "Kindly trot around and see if any of the ribs on my other side are cracked."

"I'm afraid if they are, they will have to stay cracked, for Granny says China cement won't hold, and it would cost too much to get you riveted, you know."

"I am aware of the condition of the exchequer," he returned dryly.

"Anyway," Little-girl went on, "there was nothing at all to laugh at, and if it is risky you shouldn't do it. Granny would be most unhappy if you were to break; she wouldn't have anything happen to you for worlds."

The griffin winked. "I believe you," he said.

"I am very old and valuable—very old, and very valuable. In other words, I am valuable because I am old, and old because I am valuable, you see?"

"I'm afraid I don't exactly," she said, looking puzzled. "It sounds mixed. Perhaps if you were to think it over, and say it another way—"

"Think!" snapped the griffin. "Think! Don't talk nonsense, child! I have done absolutely nothing but think since the stone age."

"The stone age?" Little-girl repeated. "That sounds queer too; I know about the middle ages; perhaps you mean one of them?"

"I mean stone age," said the griffin, with some heat.

"Oh, all right!" she returned quickly, for he had ruffled up his head feathers. "It doesn't matter in the least. But about your being valuable: Does Granny know it? She so often says we are poor, with just nothing but this old house and garden. We have corn-cakes very, very often; if we were rich, we wouldn't, you know, and if we had valuable things, why, we would be rich, I should think."

"Odso! I'm as old as he is," remarked the gargoyle, irrelevantly.

"Pardon me," said the griffin, turning to him with a cold stare. "Not within centuries, my dear boy. You are Early English, or something of that sort. What is your date, do you remember?"

"It's 1580," answered the gargoyle promptly. "I finished off the water-spout of an inn on Cheapside—a mightily fine inn! 'Twas there the Lord High Chancellor's players used to stop. Marry! I have seen Queen Elizabeth, and the Queen of Scots, and James the First, and Charles, the Martyr, and the Merry Charles, and—"

"Spare us! Spare us!" cried the griffin. "Do not, I pray of you, grow reminiscent; nothing bores me like history. You undoubtedly have the 1580 accent. We will let it go at that. But permit me to settle the question of age while we are about it. I was chipped out in Athens, and taken to Rome in the time of the Cæsars."

"Which one?" asked the gargoyle.

"Several, several," returned the griffin, airily. "Historical names are most tedious."

"Peradventure thou be so old, thy memory is gone," retorted the gargoyle. "It hath that look."

"My memory gone? My memory? Did you say memory?" he answered in a peculiarly calm voice.

"Oh, please, please don't quarrel!" cried Little-girl, as she noticed his claws moving in and out. "It's most unpleasant for everybody when you do. I don't like you to talk about your ages, anyway, for I am quite new. I do not even go back to William IV or Victoria."

"Thou canst not help that," the gargoyle remarked, sympathetically.

"She doesn't want to," sniffed the griffin.

"She couldn't help it, if she did want to," said the other.

Little-girl shook her head at each of them.

"Oh, don't begin again!" she entreated. "But please be good enough to tell me if one cannot be valuable, even if one is not old?"

"Marry, yes!" answered the gargoyle. "Thou art."

"Well, I'm not so sure," put in the griffin moodily. "She's a nice enough little thing;—good combination of colors—yellow hair, brown eyes, peach-blossom pink and white face, and so forth; and of course there is a sentimental value attached to little girls; but what would she sell for? *That's* the point."

"Sell for?" said the gargoyle, with a gasp. "Sell for! Faith, who wants to sell her? Bethink you what the garden would be without her! Fancy this old house without her! Little-girl is the only young thing about it. Granny is old; Mammy is old; the peacock is old; Pan and the dial are very old. They sleep in the sun and dream of yesterday. Little-girl is the only one who dreams of tomorrow. They be all so old—so old."

"But not so old as I am," said the griffin, yawn-

ing. "Nor so valuable. I used to wait before the temple of Flora. Aye, between the flight of marble steps and the tall white pillars. There were the mighty carved doors, one on each side, and I saw the little maidens carry in the garlands of fresh flowers every morning. On festal days they wreathed my wings with roses. Then came War and Calamity. My temple was torn down, and I was carried across the sea. They set me upon the stone gate-post that stood without a strong castle in Devon, and they carved new English lettering below me, and the date of my removal,—'tis easily found."

Little-girl leaned up and read, running her finger along the deeply-cut quaint letters and figures, which spelt: "Roman Gryphon, 1160."

"What did you, all the years?" asked the gargoyle.

"I have been on guard," he answered. "I guarded the Temple of Flora; I watched the Devonshire castle; I am on guard here. The man who chipped me from the marble talked to me while he worked. 'I will make you part lion, part eagle,' he said, 'for strength is best when it is of two kinds; the strength blent of the earth and of the heavens. So I will give you the strong body and the mighty wings, and I will consecrate you to the Sun, the strength-giver.'"

The griffin stopped speaking, closed his eyes and stretched slowly and softly, like a great cat. The gargoyle said nothing, so the child leaned over and touched his rough head.

"And you?" she asked. "What did the man say when he chipped you from the gray stone?"

The gargoyle sighed.

"It does not matter now, though it seemed to then," he said. "In very truth, 'tis strange it does not matter now: that I do not even hate him when I hated him so bitterly long ago. Many times I wished that he had never made me."

"Why?" said Little-girl gently.

"Because he made me as I am. When he had the stone and the chisel and the hammer, it seemeth he might have carven a thing that was beautiful, or a symbol of strength, like the griffin. But he said: 'I will make you ugly,' and he smiled as he said it, and chipped away heartily; 'I will make you so fearsome and ugly that the children will either laugh or run away from you, and the women will close their eyes as they pass by you, and the men will point at you and call you my "grotesque masterpiece." I will make of you a thing to keep evil spirits and mischievous goblins away from all houses where you are hung.'"

"And have you?" asked Little-girl eagerly.
"Have you?"

"Peradventure I have," he answered, "but I cannot tell for certain. I have watched by night and day, but have seen naught to fear, naught as misshapen as myself. The Angel of Life and the Angel of Death have entered the houses I have watched; they have both come to this house by daylight and dark, and I know them well. But they are angels and fear nothing, neither are they to be feared."

"Perhaps it is as Granny thinks," said the child, "and there are no evil spirits except those within us."

The gargoyle smiled, but Little-girl did not stop him.

"Then there are none here, dear Little-girl," he answered, "either within or without."

The katydids broke into shrill singing overhead, which stopped as suddenly as it had begun. The peacock trailed his emerald and bronze tail across the grass beneath the magnolias. Now and then he set his feathers a-quiver, and called stridently that it was going to rain. The grasshoppers played hide-and-seek, and the air trembled in small hot waves from the ground.

In the center of the fountain, Pan seemed to droop among his reeds, and dream. The shadow-finger moved around the gray sun-dial, and the dazzling blue dragon-flies darted across it.

Then old Mammy came through the garden, her red turban nodding like a big poppy.

"Whar' am you, honey?" she called in her soft throaty voice. "I reckon yo' sure am lost dis time. Lil-gal! Lil-gal! If yo's hidin' yo' betta come out right smart, for dis ole woman's 'bout done lookin' yander an' nigh—"

Presently, she came up to the steps, and stopped.

"Dat blessed lamb," she muttered, stooping down. "Soun' asleep between de ole grippin an' de gargle. It am beauty an' de beastes for certain sure. Here, yo' baby, wake up! Yo' granny wants yo' pretty soon—wake up."

Little-girl sat up and rubbed her eyes. "Is that you, Mammy?" she said.

"Is dat me? Mercy, honey, yo' think yo' ole mammy was a fairy, or some sort o' angel, yo' been 'sociating with in yo' dreams?"

"I see it is you, now, Mammy. Will you please look at the gargoyle, and tell me if he is smiling?"

The old woman glanced at the child, anxiously.

"Hab yo' a touch o' de sun—or isn't yo' wide awake, chile?"

"Look and see, Mammy," insisted Little-girl.

Mammy turned and looked at the gargoyle. "He ain't smilin' none, honey," she answered. "He hab jest dat 'no-friends-no-money' look he always hab.—He certinly ain't smilin', no, siree!—"

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"Now look at the griffin, and see if he is the same as always," said Little-girl.

"I got sumpin to tell you 'bout dat ole grippin!" exclaimed Mammy, her face suddenly wrinkled into smiles. "Sumpin I come out in the gyarden to tell yo' when you seem hid 'most as well as Moses in the bulrushes."

"Look at him first, and see if he is at all—*queer*—please, Mammy," pleaded Little-girl.

Mammy looked, and then shook her head vigorously.

"No queerer dan usual," she replied. "He'd take de medal for queerness mos' anywhere, and dat's de truf! He ain't a right smart 'Merican eagle, nor he ain't a out-an-out British lion. He jest naturally don't 'pear to know which side de fence he's on. But yo' set up an' listen; I got news—dat's what I got. Now, den, am yo' listenin'? Well, dat ole grippin—"

"I would rather not hear anything about the griffin, if you please, Mammy. I am tired of him," she answered.

"So! So!" said the old nurse. "Well, if you don't want to hear nothin' 'bout de grippin, den I ain't got nothin' to tell you."

There was silence for a few minutes, except for the humming of the bees. Then—"You may tell

me about him, Mammy," said Little-girl. "Sit down here on the step."

"Well, it's more like one ob dose book stories than life happenings, honey. Come here de odder day when yo' was up in de garret playin' 'lady' in yo' granny's gowns, an ole man, powerful out ob de ordinary, wid green glasses on his eyes and a white umbrella hat on his head, lined with grass green. He ask to see Miss Nellie—'scuze me, yo' granny, I mean, and den yo' granny an' dat ole man dey go all roun' de gyarden, an' de ole man tote a spyglass. Here an' dere dey stop an' admire de fixins, but dey stop de longest by de gargle an' de grippin. De ole man he seem bubblin' wid joy, an' he peered first at de gargle, den at de grippin, like dey was long-lost friends."

"Is that all, Mammy?" said Little-girl, yawning as politely as she could.

"No, mam, dat is *not* all. Dat ole man he tuk de mos' powerful fancy to de grippin, an' he sayd plump and plain he *mus'* hab him!"

"What did Granny say?" asked Little-girl, her eyes wide open.

"Yo' granny she said, 'No! No! No!' An' she got dat white, proud 'spression."

"I know," said Little-girl. "And then, Mammy?"

"Then, honey, de ole man he lose his temper, an' he rampage up an' down de lawn, an' he say he'll pay more money for de grippin dan anybody else'd pay for de whole house an' gyarden, an' after dat dey had it back an' forth cool an' perlite for a spell, but sort o' dangerous."

"And then?" said Little-girl.

"Then he went away, and yo' Granny she walk up an' down whar de ole peacock is, an' den she come in an' sit in de parlor wid de blinds all drawn, like dere's a funeral. An' de big clock ticked mighty loud in de hall."

The old woman paused so long that Little-girl thought the story was over, but the soft voice went on:

"When to-day come, dat ole man he sent a letta yo' Granny says, sayin' he jest must hab de grippin, an' he sends de money wid de letta what he says de grippin's worth—no more—no less—an' de up-shot is yo' Granny's goin' to *send him de grippin an' keep de money*, for she needs *de money* more dan she needs *de grippin*.

"Dat's de end, honey, only now I reckon you'll bof up an' go to de sea-side twill de heat spell's over."

"And is the griffin really, really valuable, Mammy?"

"I spec' he is, baby; I spec' he is. Ole an' valuable, an' dat's de truf."

"He said he was," answered Little-girl. Then she smiled at the rough gray head on the water spout.

"I'm glad the old gentleman didn't want the gargoyle," she said.

The two sat still on the door step in the golden light of the late afternoon. Presently Little-girl sprang up, danced round in front of Mammy, and caught her hand. "Come!" she cried. "Come into the house and please get me a piece of bread and butter—if it isn't time for tea, Mammy—please."

"Dat I will," replied the old woman, rising stiffly. "An' I'll put sugar on it too. I reckon we can afford sugar to-day."

THE QUEEN'S TEAR-BOTTLE

IN a country that is called new, there was a great new city, and in the city, among many others, a high white building, and in the building there was a room wherein sat a Man-Who-Was-Rich.

The room was most beautiful, though only in a stiff, uncomfortable sort of way, because it had been made for business, and not pleasure.

There was a heavy carved desk, and a heavy carved table, and heavy carved chairs upright and hard.

The Man-Who-Was-Rich sat before his desk with his overcoat on, for the room was cold. He had turned the collar up to his ears, and his face wore an expression not pleasant. Bushy gray eyebrows drawn together, and a close-shut mouth accounted chiefly for the expression—that is outwardly, although his eyes were of a flinty-gray and inclined to be cynical at the best of times. But only extreme discomfort could loosen his tongue, and he was suffering from discomfort now.

A thin veil of gray lay over furniture and floor. It blurred the windows where a film of frost did not creep across them. It lay an impalpable thing

on the gilded steam pipes; it showed faintly on ledger and day-book.

The Man-Who-Was-Rich glanced around with an exclamation of annoyance. At that moment the great office door opened and a brisk sort of little man stepped in.

"Didn't hear me ring, so I just came along to see if you were down," he said chirpily.

"Beastly weather—eh, what?—Oh, yes! I know—I know. Weather doesn't count with you. But conditions might, now?—Conditions. No coal—plumbing on the rocks—roads simply awful—trains blocked—everything on the bias! Might as well lock up, eh?—Blizzard going strong still," glancing at the window.

"I shall stop down-town my usual hours, Jenkins," answered the Man-Who-Was-Rich. Then as an afterthought, "Have you seen the woman who dusts?"

"Not for days," he returned. "She hadn't the sense to send a substitute either. So thoughtless. But I cheer myself with Wilde's philosophy—Oscar Wilde, you know. You remember his classic? 'Remove not Dust! It is the bloom of the Ages!' Pretty thought, eh?"

The other smiled grimly. "That fakir!" he said.

"From my point of view, genius!" laughed Jenkins. "Well, good-by till the weather becomes civ-

ilized. Horribly cold in here! Look out for pneumonia, old man. Horribly cold!—Seem to be getting up a bit of steam though.—Bye-bye.”

The door closed. A metallic clicking followed. A spasmodic symphony from the gilded pipes.

The Man-Who-Was-Rich rose and shook himself, as though from a sudden icy wave.

“Outrageous!” he said. “Outrageous—in such a building. There is no excuse!” He touched a bell, pushed it harder, waited. No one answered, so he sat down heavily at the desk again. A quick step came along the hall. A knock.

“Come in!” he called.

An office-boy entered—a boy in his early teens—with the quick movements, the keen face and the sharp tongue of one who had learned early to fend for himself. He wore the blue clothes and brass buttons so beloved of his kind, and he carried a dust cloth that apparently he loathed.

Ducking his head with more deference than he usually accorded, he swept his eye around the neglected room.

“I come in to dust, sir,” he explained. “Don’t want to disturb you—but the dust-lady ain’t been ’round these three bad days.”

“What detains her?” questioned the man shortly.

“Couldn’t say, sir,” the boy replied, busy with the despised rag. “Coal is short on the East Side,

I hear. Mebby she ain't had her share. 'The blizzard's been sumptin fierce. Mebby she jest couldn't climb through."

"Perhaps not," admitted the other.

"Yes, sir," said the boy.

No sound followed but the disjointed clicking of the pipes.

"Where is the janitor?" queried the Man irritably, breaking in on the pipes.

"Got a swelled knee from somethin'," said the boy. "In bed, sir."

"Oh!" answered the Man.

"Yes, sir," assented the boy. Then he volunteered a few words.

"Isn't much doin'. Most of the offices closed to-day, sir,—froze out. Bells on this flat on the blink. Some of the gentlemen couldn't get down, I guess. Traffic blocked most everywhere."

"I got down all right," said the Man.

"Elevated?" inquired the boy.

"Certainly not,—my car," was the reply.

"Oh, yes, sir," he answered.

About all the gray bloom was gone now, and the boy stood by the shut door. He grinned cheerfully.

"Anything else, sir?"

"No—" he said shortly. "No, thanks."

"I'll look in about noon," he volunteered.

"Guess you expect your two clerks, don't you, sir?"

"I have been expecting them all morning," answered the Man-Who-Was-Rich. The words were bitten off.

"Yes, sir," nodded the boy. "Too bad, sir,—but," hopefully, "mebby it's a good day fer them to be off. All the mail trains delayed, you know. Electric an' telephone wires jest naturally took this time to strike work too. Ain't no excuse I can see."

"I wondered at the silence," remarked the other, looking up. "Underground wiring too—absolutely absurd to have them out of order. Are they working at them, do you know?"

"Yes, sir," answered the boy. "Cold work too, sir,—down below zero."

"I imagine so," he assented.

"Yes, sir. Well, I'll be in at noon to see if you need me."

The Man-Who-Was-Rich heard the light steps swing along the hall. Silence returned. The pipes had ceased clicking, but accomplished little.

An hour passed. The Man decided to go home, then remembering his car was ordered for four, and that the telephone was useless, decided not to go. At best, he detested the Elevated, and the Elevated at noon and on such a day was anathema.

Lunch would be a break, though. He concluded to take lunch early; there was a place two blocks away where he often dropped in.

Turning up his coat collar higher, he went out. An icy sleet stung his face, and the wind between the high buildings almost carried him off his feet. Drifts of snow swirled along the pavements, and where the asphalt was uncovered it was of a slipperiness unbelievable. A man going headlong across the street knocked against him heavily, and he fell.

When he got up he felt shaken from head to foot. With an exclamation of rage he retraced his steps slowly to the tall building. Every joint in his body seemed racked. He was dizzy from the fall, and now the beating sleet made him see red.

For a moment the Man-Who-Was-Rich clearly realized that he was no longer young. He took the elevator up to his office, shook himself free from snow and sat down again at his desk.

Presently came the quick steps of the office boy, and his knock.

"Come in!" answered the Man, rather eagerly. The boy came in. He was a cheerful boy.

"Shall I fetch you some sandwiches, sir?" he asked.

"Why, yes—you may," consented the Man.

"All right, sir," he nodded.

When he returned he bore a small Japanese tray whereon was a tumbler, a bottle of milk and a blue plate decorated with four good-sized sandwiches.

"Light fare, sir," he grinned, "but jest better'n goin' out in the blizzard—"

"Much better—thanks," assented the Man-Who-Was-Rich.

"Yes, sir. Shall I go now, sir—or is there anything else—"

"Oh, you may stop a moment," said the other. "I will see presently."

He ate a sandwich. Another. Another. Then the last. Also he drank the milk.

"They are very good," he remarked then, "these sandwiches. Better than any I remember for—for quite a while."

The boy grinned. "Me mother made them, sir," he explained. "There's jest her an' me. I got the milk by luck."

"Your mother made them?" he questioned harshly. "Have I taken your lunch?"

"Oh, no, sir!" he laughed. "Only a bit of it. I got plenty left."

"Well, it was decidedly good of you," said the Man. Taking some coins from his pocket, he held them out. The boy shook his head.

"No—no, thank you, sir," he said. "Me mother

made them sandwiches, so I guess they were hers. She's got queer ideas—on—on hospitalities."

The Man-Who-Was-Rich slipped the coins back in his pocket. He looked the boy over.

"Where do you take your lunch?" he asked. "And are you sure you have enough left?"

"Sure. Yes, sir!" he replied. "Us office fellers get our lunch together all in one room. Bring it with us—you know. Say, we have a pretty gay time! We have an hour. We divvy up lunch mostly. Then we have shows. But I guess you wouldn't be interested?"

"Go on," said the Man.

"Half-hour shows, sir; any feller that can do a song or dance or give a monerlogue—"

"What is the lunch hour?" asked the Man.

"12:30 to 1:30," he nodded. "It's 12:20 now," taking a Waterbury out of his pocket.

"Ah, indeed," said the Man-Who-Was-Rich. "And to-day—what do you have to-day by way of entertainment, for instance?"

"The Egyptian," he answered. "The Egyptian, sir."

"I don't understand exactly," remarked the other. "I thought you gave these—these affairs yourselves. The office-boys. Talent might be developed that way, one would suppose."

"Oh, yes, sir, we do give them," he assented. "But the Egyptian blew in, an' needed the coin, so we let him go ahead. He's great, too!"

"What are his tricks,—this Egyptian?" questioned the Man-Who-Was-Rich, a slight vibration of interest in his voice. "Sleight-of-hand? Snake-charming—the Mango-flower or imitation of it—that sort of thing?"

"Oh, no, sir! He tells stories," explained the office-boy.

"Quite likely," acquiesced his listener. "Most of them do, the Orientals—and so on."

The boy looked puzzled, then smiled.

"Yer wrong, sir. It's yarns he tells. Jest yarns, ye know. About things that sort of couldn't be. Made-up ones you wisht was true. Rabian-Night stuff. He keeps you jumpy to know how they are goin' to pan out."

The Man-Who-Was-Rich raised his gray eyebrows.

"Oh, I see," he said. "But to get such an effect from a lot of practical boys, why, he must be an artist, one would say? Where does he come from—this Egyptian fellow?"

"Down round by the East River, sir. He lives among the Turks an' Armenians an' Dagoes that wear turbans when they get here, mostly, or fezzes."

"Oh," smiled the other. "In some foreign quarter."

"Yes, sir. I've heard he works at beaten metal. I met him once with his old father. Taller'n him yet, sir, fer all his age. I bet you, sir, you would think that old man was a thousand years old! He's got a white beard like—like Niagara Falls!"

The Man-Who-Was-Rich laughed. It was a long time since he had laughed that way.

"Indeed!" he nodded then. "Quite an apt description. So this Egyptian, son of the ancient party, is coming to-day to tell you office-boys impossible yarns—is he?"

"Yes, sir," he answered. Then as by inspiration, "Would you like to come along and hear him, sir? Kinder dull on this flat. Won't you come along?"

The Man glanced around. It was dull. A silent telephone, frost-clouded windows. He turned to the office-boy.

"Why, thanks,—I think I will," he replied.

"We'll be on our way, then, sir," said the boy with alacrity.

They went down the echoing halls. The boy took the stairs, and the Man-Who-Was-Rich followed; after an almost incredible descent they entered a narrow passage and passed into a darkish room with court windows. About a dozen boys

were gathered around an open grate fire. A coal fire, red and bright. The place was warm.

"They let us have the grate lit at noon, sir," explained the boy, "for the pipes don't do much business in this room."

The Man seemed to find this satisfactory. They all rose and nodded to him, making way as he approached. His boy brought a chair for him over by the warmth. There were wooden chairs and a wooden table in the room.

"An open fire was pleasant," the Man-Who-Was-Rich remarked to him as he sat down.

"Yes, sir," he agreed. The other seemed overawed and their voices died to whispers.

"This sooth-sayer of yours?" questioned the Man. "Has he arrived?"

"Oh, the Egyptian?" grinned the boy. "I hear him outside now a-shakin' the snow off. We can take an extra bit of time to-day, most all the offices bein' closed but yours, sir."

"I should consider mine closed also," he answered.

The boy acquiesced. "Here comes Abydos Khon!" he said. Then sotto voce, "It's only when he's up against it we can get him, sir. We mostly take up a collection before he begins an' hand it in."

"Ah, indeed," said the Man-Who-Was-Rich.

The door swung open, and into the fire-lit room a man entered.

The boys all saluted him noisily, and he bowed to all collectively, but impressively.

To the man by the fire he paid no attention. The boys only were his employers.

"This is Mr. Mavor—John W. Mavor," announced the office-boy to him. Then "Mr. Mavor, meet Abydos Khon!"

They bowed rather ceremoniously, and looked at each other. The Egyptian saw a tall heavy man, worn of face and gray of hair. A man of poise, a perfect product of his time.

The Man-Who-Was-Rich saw one who seemed to belong to other places, and other days. His face, unmarked and young, was of an almost flawless beauty of feature. His eyes were strangely luminous, and his hair thick but silvery white. He wore it cropped about his ears as a child's hair is often cropped. On his feet were high boots of brown leather—the uncouth boots of Russian peasants, and he wore a heavy cloak of coarse brown woolen stuff. This cloak was fastened about the waist by a leather belt with a silver buckle. It was hooded and had wide sleeves. Almost it gave the impression of being the surtout of some holy order.

Having greeted all, the Egyptian sprang lightly onto the table. There he sat cross-legged in the old, old fashion of the East. He smiled at the cir-

cle of young faces, but graveiy. So far he had not spoken.

One boy took a cap from its peg and passed it around until twelve dimes were collected. Then he threw in his own. The Man-Who-Was-Rich held out his contribution; a large piece of silver.

The boy shook his head. "No, thank you, sir," he said. "You are a guest. We have one now and then—mostly boys from the other buildings. But it's understood. Abydos Khon is always satisfied."

Sweeping the silver into his hand he gave it to the Egyptian who placed it in some pocket of his surtout. No atom of his dignity was lost. He bowed including all. Then the boys gathered closer to the table, their brass buttons twinkling with every movement of their restless young bodies. Settling down they turned expectant faces towards Abydos Khon. They had overcome their first shyness of John W. Mavor, and he felt he had lost any formidable aloofness. Besides the story-teller only was the man of the hour.

Abydos Khon sat very still. His face shone in the fire-light, as though cast in bronze. The silvery hair had a metallic glitter; the silver buckle on his belt gleamed against his rough cloak. His hands were folded together in a repose unspeakable, and his whole body was a thing set in perfect calm.

But though he might have posed for the figure of

a graven image, from his eyes looked out a spirit as of living flame. When every face was turned towards him the Egyptian spoke, and his voice was low, but clear as temple-bells at twilight.

There was no flaw in his English, but a cadence and rhythm separated it from all English the Man-Who-Was-Rich had hitherto heard.

He leaned forward in his chair to listen.

The Egyptian began slowly, his face rapt as in a dream.

"I will relate to you, my little ones," he said, "the story of the Queen's Tear-Bottle.

"It is a most ancient story, being handed down from the priests of the Temple of Amen-Ra—the Lord of the Sun and the Horizon—unto this day.

"It has been written upon the stones of the walls of palaces, and enrolled upon illuminated papyrus. It has been painted in imperishable colors on the Sarcophagus of a King. It has been told by word of mouth, and sung and chanted; and made into a dance also,—a dance of death and tears. It has been played by players before light-hearted court people, and it has been woven into books of romance.

"But the time is short, and I cannot give it to you as it should be given, with flowers of speech and music of lute and string, and colored lights and golden tapestries and the scent of incense.

Nay, with my poor voice only can the story be told. So of your kindness have patience if it unfolds not to your liking.

“Now, in the rich days of Egypt before the gods of different strengths were dead,—when the Pharaohs were on the throne, and Karnak was a city—when the Israelites were slaves, and the priests, my far-off kinsmen, made burnt-offerings to Amen-Ra and the little gods, his satellites, there was a mighty King in Egypt.

“Great was this King, and greatly to be feared. Yet he was just, and well beloved of his people. His bowmen and spearmen and charioteers were as the sands of the sea, and his tame war-lions were many. Also he owned slaves from every country and his camels and herds were legion. His palaces shone with amber and beaten silver, and his silken tents had walls of embroidery; while the arabesques upon the hangings were set in jewels and there were golden bells above the curtained doors. Vast were his treasures and hidden in many places. Chests of gems, and bags of coin, and boxes of attar of rose and ointments of the Orient.

“But of all this mighty King’s possessions, he loved but one thing only, and that was his wife, Aureanta. Not in the East and not in the West had one been found so beautiful. In the South she knew no rival. But they had brought her cap-

tive to the King from the far North—so of the North one might not speak, for the Queen averred that others there had no less beauty than she.

“Thereafter many princes journeyed to the North—but this is beside my story.

“Yet although Aureanta had been brought captive to Egypt, she was the daughter of a northern prince whose army had been overthrown.

“Although they called her but a beautiful barbarian, she was versed in many things new and strange in the land of the desert, and looked and seemed a very princess, even from the day she came bound to Egypt.

“When the King saw her he marveled at her white and golden beauty,—for her skin was as the leaf of the white lotus, and her hair gold as a wheat-field in the sun.

“And the King loved her madly and made her his wife against all the counsels of his wisest men, and readers of the stars,—as indeed is the way of Kings.

“But the Queen Aureanta loved him as well. Therefore, in spite of the wise men there was joy and dancing at the wedding feast, and no shadow rested upon the land of Egypt for many days. It was the time of roses, and the young King and Queen were often seen walking in their garden beneath the palms. And the people, so seeing them,

were happy, for it is a beautiful thing to look on youth and love and summer weather.

"Yet this is but earth, and so trouble approached. Dark as a cloud that blots out the sun it came nearer and nearer on silent wings.

"For reasons no man could tell, the gods seemed angry, and sacrifices were offered to them in the temples by day and by night. The smoke of them blackened the air incessantly; the sound of incantations and prayers was never still. The Temple-bells rang from dawn to dark. But it availed not. The gods were angry. It seemed they liked not to look upon too great joy. Rumors of wars were on the wind, and wars broke out. Little wars at first, and then those that were greater.

"From Asia came the Persians, hordes and mighty hordes of them, and the tribes of the Hittites—long the enemies of Egypt—and these banded together. Then also the Bedouins joined their train, and out-law Arabs who knew no ruler, but were beyond all grace.

"The King of Egypt gathered his bowmen, and spearmen, and took his army of sworded chariots, and swiftly made dread battle upon these, the oncoming foes; and he pressed them back the way they had come, though the road ran red with blood and was salted by the bones of the fallen.

"With bows and arrows and two-edged spears

and catapults they fought, and also with liquid fire and the sworded chariots that mowed the battalions down as grain.

"The Great Gates of the walled city wherein the Queen and the people remained, were fast closed.

"No one might enter, and none go out save only the King's runners.

"Outside the walls many smaller enemies camped awaiting the day when perchance they might break in and pillage and kill and bear away slaves.

"Still to the borders of the sea the King pursued his enemies, and the battle raged by night and day.

"Throughout Egypt the wells had been poisoned, and the people on the little farms died by hundreds, and the food grew less and less and pestilence was on the air.

"In the palace within the city walls the young Queen from the North sat among her terrified maidens. She had put away her robes of beauty and wore a woolen mourning gown of white, girdled at the waist with woolen cord only, and her golden hair was unbound.

"As they were there together, a sound of running came over the mosaic floors of the palace, and a youth entered, panting and spent, the dust thick upon him.

"He threw himself at the Queen's feet. 'What

now, Cresta?" she cried, trembling. 'Oh, quickly! Tell me what news has brought you thus spent and troubled!'

"The battle still rages on the border, your Majesty; but to-day we lose and the King hath been wounded—yet not grievously. He sent me that you might not by chance hear worse report, and also to bear to you his love.'

"She stooped and touched the boy. 'Rise!' she said, 'O dear runner. Return to the King. Tell him I catch my falling tears in the crystal bottle he gave to me. They fall through all the hours of his absence. Tell him I will lay them on the altar of the gods as my sacrifice.—Bear to him also my eternal love.'

"The runner departed, and the Queen sank back upon her floor-cushions. From beneath the woolen folds above her heart she took a crystal bottle, and as her tears fell they were caught and held within it. Many and bitter were her tears, and long they fell. All through the day they fell ceaselessly, and through the night, for she thought of the battle lost, and the King wounded and spent.

"But on the morning of the next day an old, old minister of State came to the Queen.

"'Your Majesty,' he said, in his quavering voice. 'The people need bread. There is indeed wheat in



"Return to the King. Tell him I catch my falling tears in the crystal bottle he gave to me."

the city, but the people have no money wherewith to buy it.'

"Then the Queen called her maids-of-honor. 'Bring all my jewels,' she commanded, 'and my golden ornaments, and all my coin stamped with the King's seal.'

"This they did and laid them at her feet. The Queen gave them to the Minister of State, sealed in caskets and held in leathern bags—and she summoned her pages to help him bear them away.

"'Take them,' she said, 'to the dealers in wheat, that they may be paid. Give the wheat to the people, and deal fairly by them every one.'

"So this was done, and again the Queen wept.

"Then once more came the Minister of State. 'O your Majesty!' he said. 'The wells are empty. All save the royal wells. Where shall the people go for water?'

"'Bid them come to the royal wells, O my friend,' she answered. 'Bid them fill their pitchers as long as water remains. See it is done in fairness to all, each one separately.'

"So he departed, and again the Queen wept.

"The little maids-of-honor who were frightened, wept also, but could not take her for a moment from her grief.

"And once again the man of State came to the

160. THE GOLDEN APPLE TREE

Queen, and he said: 'O wonderful Queen, there is dread illness among the people. They fall upon the streets; the little children fall, and the old men and women. There are but few to nurse or care for them so many are stricken.'

"Then the young Queen rose, and said, 'Bring all within the palace that can be cared for here. My servants being well shall feed and wait upon them. I myself will go down into the city and help those whom I find; and with me I will take three of my pages to carry baskets of bread and wine and medicines, and fresh garments.'

"So she went abroad in the city, and by night and day forgot her grief in ministering to those who had fallen into the illness of death. And some mended and grew well again, and some died, but the Queen did not leave them.

"Then one day having kept long watch by the dying, she herself fell into a faint, and the runner of the King came once more, and found her so, and stayed by her until her heart beat again.

"Eagerly she looked up into his face and caught his hands. 'O dear runner!' she cried. 'What news? What news of my Lord the King? Speak quickly!' Her eyes shone and color came once more into her face. But the young runner had no words. 'Quickly!' she commanded again. 'O dear runner!'

“ ‘The battle is over and done,’ he told her, ‘and the day is ours!’

“She drew a deep breath of gladness. ‘Most glorious news!’ she cried. ‘But what of my Lord the King? What news of him?’

“The runner bowed his head. ‘The King has passed on and into the land of peace,’ he answered.

“For a little while she replied nothing. Then the boy, looking up, saw she smiled. ‘Now, O good runner,’ she said, ‘methinks all is told indeed. Naught is left for me but to go out and meet my Master the King. Doth he return along the road of battles?’

“ ‘Ay!’ answered the runner. ‘By the very road he went. His scarred battalions and his war-lions come with him also triumphant, and they bring with them the captives, in legions far as the eye can see.’

“Hearing this the Queen called her tiring women, and bade them array her in her robes of State and put pomegranate flowers in her hair. Also she sent the heralds to trumpet the news of Victory from the city walls.

“And before she set out in her golden litter to meet those who returned from war, she went to the Temple of Amen-Ra, the Lord of the Sun and the Horizon.

“There the High Priests greeted her. She

smiled upon them even as she had smiled upon the young runner.

“‘I do not come to pray, O most High Servants of the Gods,’ she said. ‘I come but to lay my offering of tears upon the Altar. I had forgotten when the people fell sick and died that I had promised my tears as an offering of sacrifice. I even forgot to weep, O Holy Ones. They were so pitiful, the little children, and the old who fell ill, that if I wept at all it was for them, and I forgot to catch the tears for the Gods. I pray you ask them to forgive me; and take you this crystal bottle—which alas! is but half-way filled, for some tears were lost—and lay it at the feet of Amen-Ra. ’Tis now a thank-offering only—for the great war hath ended. A thank-offering, and not a sacrifice as it should have been, O Holy Ones.’

“So the priests bowed and took from her hand the crystal tear-bottle, promising to present it to the God of the Sun, and she was satisfied. But again she spoke.

“‘Bless me, my fathers, and send thy blessing to the King of Egypt, for having conquered, he returns.’

“With uplifted hands they blessed her and she departed. But not knowing the King was dead the priests wondered at the whiteness of her face,

and the glory of her robes—which were ceremonial robes and heavy with much gold.

“The litter-bearers bore the Queen onward until they met the triumphant legions of Egypt.

“At their head was carried the body of the King upon the linked shields of his guard, and beside the shields walked the greatest of the tame war-lions. They lowered the bier at the Queen’s approach, and she stepped from her litter and knelt in the sand beside it. The mighty warriors of the guard wondered at her that she did not weep.

“‘So you return to me in triumph, O My Lord!’ she said, as though he heard. ‘’Tis joy to meet thee. Thy people have been sore beset, and very pitiful. But all I could do, O most dear—I have done. It was but little, and I forgot to lay my sacrifice of tears upon the altar of Amen-Ra. Quite forgot, until word came of thy victory. Now it must serve but for a thank-offering. The priests have promised to offer it thus with incantations and praise, that the gods may be content and not angry with us any more. Perchance we were too happy—and thereby forgot them in our hearts.’

“Gently she stooped and laid her lips against his face that had still the dust of battle upon it. As she did not rise, and the moments passed, the guards looked into each other’s eyes, and were troubled,

thinking she had fainted. Then one bolder than the rest, lifted her up. And they saw her spirit was no longer in her body, but had hastened on to overtake that of her Lord the King of Egypt, so that it might journey with him into the land of Peace.

"The High Priests laid the tear-bottle on the altar at the feet of Amen-Ra as they had promised. There it lay, O my little ones, amid the daily offerings of fresh flowers, for many, many, many years.

"When the city long afterwards was burned and sacked and the temples destroyed, an aged priest took the token from the desecrated altar of the Sun-God, to bear it away. And, behold! The tears within the crystal had by some miracle turned into a jewel the wonder of which no tongue can tell!

"There it shone with serene rays of light, that all might see and marvel. Moreover, that time-worn priest secreted the token, and at his death gave it to another, and though the temples were laid waste, yet has the Queen's Tear-Bottle been passed down from one to another of that priestly line unto this very day."

In the fire-lit room there was silence, and one boy after another roused as from a spell. The Egyptian rose and stepped to the floor with the

light spring of youth. He too was as one who had come out of a dream.

"Thanks, Abydos Khon!" the boys called. "That was a good story! Some story, Abydos Khon!" One after another they registered their approval by word of mouth, and so scattered in different directions, shaking from them rather gladly, perhaps, the mystic impression of his words, and making for the world they belonged to. So youth can escape quickly from one condition to another. But age is not so.

The Man-Who-Was-Rich got up stiffly from his chair beside the hearth, and approaching the hooded figure of Abydos Khon as he was about to depart, touched him on the arm.

The Egyptian turned and looked into the cynical eyes of John Mavor.

"Who are you, Abydos Khon?" he asked.

"Why should I think you would believe me if I told?" he questioned with a smile.

"Why not?" said the other.

"Because you do not easily believe," returned the Egyptian.

"Are you then so extraordinary a man one could not give credit to your identity?" Mavor asked with cold politeness.

"That is as it may be," said Abydos Khon. "But

I will try your faith. I am—of the old line of the Pharaohs!”

The Man-Who-Was-Rich gazed at the strong young figure before him, at the beautiful face that might have been cast in bronze, the eyes from which shone out the flame of the soul within, the thick white hair, white as a thing grief-stricken; the patrician hands of such vast repose.

No, it was not difficult to believe that he came of a race of Kings. But the Pharaohs!

“What proof have you of what you claim to be?” questioned the Man-Who-Was-Rich.

Abydos Khon smiled, and the smile was like a light.

“Ah!” he returned. “I was right. You have no faith. Well—what does it matter? Yet this much I will say. My people of Egypt do not aver their line of birth unless they have proof thereof. The birth records are sacred—but not for every idle and curious eye to see.” He waved his hands lightly as though dismissing the subject. Then, bowing deeply, turned to the door.

But the Man caught him by the arm again.

“Wait,” he said in his clear-cut voice. “Wait, Abydos Khon. I am not done with my questions—though of course you may not answer. I desire to know a thing or two regarding your statements in the little story. A strange story, Abydos Khon,

and akin to those of the Bible we were bidden to believe in our childhood. No whit stranger than these most true stories, and very beautiful. Therefore, tell me—what of the Queen's Tear-Bottle you assured your credulous audience had come down to this day? Was that truth or polite fiction? What of the jewel it held—a jewel compounded of tears, as you told us? Why go so far into particulars? Why drag in miracles or enchantments? It did not seem necessary.”

Abydos Khon regarded him steadily. Beneath the brown hood—that was like a friar's hood—his eyes were as stars. About him clung the calm of the East. It enfolded him as an intangible garment. For a moment he stood so; then bowed.

“I admit your right to question,” he said, “and it is my pleasure to answer. The story as I told it, is true—if we may believe any story so handed down. It has come with little variation through the priests of the temples that belong to days that are very far off. Some stories are so wondrous, so lovely, they carry the power of conviction. Nothing can be added to them or taken away that would not mar their perfection. This every man that hears them acknowledges. Therefore in the chronicles and repetitions they remain unchanged and they seem to need no proof. Yet of this story, I alone, of all the living, *have* a proof.” From the

inner folds of his cloak above his heart, he drew a crystal vial. In the dim room it shone with a soft radiance. He held it out.

"Look!" he said in his bell-like voice. "Look! It is the Queen's Tear-Bottle!"

The Man-Who-Was-Rich started, his eyes fixed on the shining thing; then he reached out and took it with his own hand, but with an incredulous smile.

"Oh, come!" he exclaimed. "Oh, come now! You can hardly expect one to credit this. To accept it as genuine, you know, or connect it with your very wonderfully recited story."

The Egyptian shook his silvery head. "One does not look for credence in the hard-to-believe. Not at least here, in the City of Money. It may be the boys believed while they listened. Perhaps they still believe. But you—you are different. A product of your time and city. Still at the least, I will leave with you food for thought. Hold the bottle to the fire-light."

The other did so and looked long. It was a lovely thing he held, and made of a transparent crystal luminous in places as though flecked with phosphorus. The mouth of the bottle was wide and flaring, but the neck slender and long. Below, it was delicately curved, and at the base so rounded it could not be set upright.

The stopper seemed made of a single opal, and

was cut and threaded as a screw is threaded, so only by turning could it be fitted to its place. When once fitted it held perfectly, and nothing could escape, not even vapor.

The Man-Who-Was-Rich turned the bottle a little this way and that, against the red fire-light, for within something rolled softly from side to side against the crystal.

"By all that is mysterious!" he exclaimed again. "There is a jewel within it! A pearl,—perhaps; no, brighter than a pearl. A diamond? Not so brilliant. An opal—possibly an opal. How marvelous! For the jewel, or whatever it is, is far too large to have fallen into the bottle. Like the camel and the needle's eye there was no possibility of entrance. A curiosity certainly. A puzzle of some sort, no doubt, originally. A puzzle yet, for that matter." He held it out to the Egyptian.

"What is this thing?" he questioned, a note of annoyance in his voice. "I want the truth."

"I have told you," Abydos Khon responded quietly. "It is the Queen's Tear-Bottle. The Queen Aureanta. Within is the jewel—as far as man can see—made of her tears. By what magic or miracle or fairy charm, who can say? Upon the bottle also is engraved the King's sign—but time has almost effaced this. From the priests of

Amen-Ra the crystal was handed down. The brothers of the Pharaohs were oftentimes the High Priests, and through many hands it has reached mine," he said, as though stating a fact easy to believe. "But now—"

"Yes?" questioned the other.

"Now the time has come to part with it. The old temples are dust, but the God of yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow needs them not. As for this token of past sorrow, I must possess it no longer."

"You mean?" again questioned the Man-Who-Was-Rich.

"I mean we have fallen on evil days, I and my people. All is gone that we called our own. My father is old and needs many things. My little sister—who is beautiful—must be cared for. My brothers who are young cannot be cast upon the world unprepared. This must be now our country—a gracious country to the friendless—but we cannot come to it as supplicants, as beggars. I have been a translator of books—but one may starve while one works. Also I have a trade of metal working. But it brings one little. Little also have we to part with. Yet there is this one precious thing. I have thought the great Art Museum might take it from me and give in return what

my people need to set their feet firmly upon this new land."

The Man-Who-Was-Rich looked down at the crystal thing. His gray eyes still held their half-skeptical smile, and yet—the story was haunting in its loveliness. The softly rolling unnamed jewel within the bottle held him—even sent a thrill to his heart, his heart long unused to thrills. If the story *should* be true, he thought.

He turned to Abydos Khon.

"As this is for sale, I will buy it," he said. "Come to my office." They went together through the almost deserted building, and into the cold room. The very air was charged with the business affairs of to-day. No touch of sentiment lay on anything.

Still holding the crystal, Mavor seated himself at his desk, drew out a check-book and lifted his pen to write.

"How much?" he asked the Egyptian shortly.

"That I do not know," Abydos Khon said vaguely, shaking his young head. "Enough to bring my people comfort until the winter is past; to help them a little. That will be enough."

The Man-Who-Was-Rich smiled grimly. "You are no merchantman, Abydos Khon," he said. "Unlike your kindred, you bring your wares to

market yet do not look for the highest bidder, nor set a price upon them. There is something lacking in you, my friend. But perhaps you are right. There is no price set upon tears—even tears that by some alchemy have been turned into a jewel. Also there can be no established value placed upon the rare, the very old, the perishable that has persisted where all else has passed.

"It may be this antique would be worth a good deal more—or a good deal less—to the Museum. But I want it and will set my own price upon it, with your permission."

He drew the book to him, wrote the check, and handed it to Abydos Khon. The man's hand trembled as he took the piece of paper. For once his calm slipped away, he gave a low cry, and dropped to his knees. Lifting the hand that had written the check, he touched it with his lips.

"It is too great a sum!" he said brokenly.

"No," said the Man-Who-Was-Rich. "I think not."

The Egyptian looked up into the strong gray face, and understood that he was satisfied.

"I thank you!" he cried. "O most kind one! The winter has been long—the ways of the land are new, we have known grief, I and my people, there has been little money. I thank you."

Rising, he took the Queen's Tear-Bottle, bowed

before it, and touched it to his forehead solemnly. Then gave it back.

He pulled the cloak about him.

"Farewell," he said. "Farewell. Abydos Khon will not forget."

The other smiled, but the smile was no longer hard.

"Farewell to you also, O Son of the Pharaohs!" he answered.

The heavy door opened, closed. Then the Man-Who-Was-Rich took the crystal bottle, slipped it into an inner pocket of his great-coat, reached for his hat and cane and went out.

The wind smote him like a whip as he reached the street. The snow drifted and swirled in white hillocks. The traffic was blocked. No motor, he concluded, could get far.

He struggled against the storm. But he was not thinking of the wind, nor the people who buffeted it beside him. His thoughts were traveling back to an old beleaguered city and a woman who wept. He saw her with the tear-bottle against her face. He saw her white mourning robes, her unbound yellow hair. She seemed strangely real. He saw her in the temple bringing her offering of tears. He saw her in her robes of State upon the scarred road whither she went to meet the dead King.

Within his coat he felt the little precious crystal.

His lips wore the old cynical expression for a moment. "I am a fool," he said half-aloud. "A fool—a fool—" But his face again changed, softened. "If it should be true—" he whispered. "If it *should*—"

Raising his eyes he saw he was passing a shop of antiquities. A well-known shop filled with the gleanings of centuries.

Entering, he sought out an old clerk, as well-known as the place. The snow melted upon his head and shoulders unnoticed. He took the crystal from his coat and handed it to the old clerk.

"Can you tell me what sort of curiosity this is?" he asked.

The clerk turned the crystal bottle about, held it to a strong light, fastened upon his eye a powerful glass, and turned and returned the crystal before he spoke.

"It is a tear-bottle," he said at last. "An Egyptian tear-bottle. Yes. Genuine. Of the Dynasty of the Rameses II—III—I do not know. The sign is cut upon it—diamond cut—but almost entirely smoothed away by time. They are very rare, these. Oh, very. I have not seen *quite* such an one. What puzzles me is the jewel within. How did it come there? Oh, you cannot say? Ah! There is no flaw in the crystal. It could not have

passed through that slender throat of glass. Have you an explanation, sir? No? Strange."

"I thank you for your opinion of the Antique," said the Man-Who-Was-Rich, placing the bottle again within his pocket, and fastening his coat.

"It has been a pleasure to see it," answered the old clerk. "A great pleasure. Should you wish to part with it at any time, sir, we would be glad to consider—"

"No, thanks, no," he answered, and went out again into the storm.

But still fragments of the words of the Egyptian sounded in his ears, insistently. "Then came an ancient minister of state to the Queen—'Your Majesty,' he said, 'the people need bread, there is wheat in the city—but they have no money to buy it.' Then the Queen called her maids-of-honor. 'Bring hither my jewels and golden ornaments,' she commanded. 'Take them to the dealers in wheat—see that they deal fairly with my people and give them bread.'

"Then came again the ancient minister. 'The wells are empty, O Your Majesty,—where shall the people go for water to drink?' 'Bid them come to the royal wells,' she answered, 'and fill their pitchers so long as the water remains.'"

On and on through the storm pressed the Man-

Who-Was-Rich. It beat against his body; but the words of the Egyptian beat still more against his soul.

"And again the ancient minister of state came, and he said, 'O wonderful Queen—there is dread illness among the people!' And she commanded her servants to bring them into the palace—and wait upon them; and she said, 'I will go down into the city and help those whom I find.' And she went abroad and by day and night forgot her own grief in ministering to those who had fallen."

On and on the words pursued him, as though carried by the wind.

"Then came the runner of the King. 'O dear runner!' she cried. 'What news? What news of my Lord the King?' And the runner bowed his head. 'The King has passed on—into the land of Peace—'

" 'Now—methinks all is told . . . naught is left for me but to meet my Master. . . .' But before she set out, she went to the Temple of Amen-Ra. . . . 'I come not to pray—but to lay my offering of tears upon the altar.' "

So the words haunted him. He bent before the wind and struggled onward. "If it *were* true," he thought. His hand went against the crystal lying near his heart.

Through the white smother of the snow he saw

a wide frosted window, and upon the white banner of the frost a lighted cross of red.

Buffeted by the storm, he stopped and gazed at it.

And it grew to be a new and wonderful sign in his eyes. The old hard look vanished out of them.

"Little Queen," he said softly. "O little Queen of the faithful heart! I would be worthy to follow you down into the city of the dead and dying. Worthy to be the keeper—even in this day—of the gift of tears you laid on the altar of the gods who are gone."

THE KING'S OPAL

IN the far-away days there lived a young king who ruled over a country in the desert.

His kingdom was really a big oasis, but being in the middle of a sea of sand it has been lost.

Little waves of sand crept over it and blotted it out as the waves of the ocean sometimes blot out a coral island.

It took an unbelievably long time to do this, but the place is quite covered now. If one could dig down deep, and the sand did not keep slipping back into the hole, as it always does, one would by and by come upon the great city and the little towns that used to be ruled over by this king, and that were so overcrowded by people even as the places of the East are now.

Nobody knows all the history of the young king by any means, but certain things regarding him have come to light, because of records the desert winds have uncovered. The story of the king's opal is the one I know, and though it sounds exactly as though it had been made out of a dream, it is none the less interesting for that, anyone will admit; and this is the story:

In the ancient oasis country the people were exceedingly wise. The women were about as wise as the men, for they studied the same subjects. It was the law of the land that everyone should be educated, and they all were; to the last point of endurance.

The things we know now and call new, for the most part they knew then,—which goes to prove that new things are really so old that they grew tiresome long ago, and were tucked away for a while and forgotten, or lost in what has been called “the mists of antiquity.”

However, gradually they came out of the mists and were perfectly new again as far as anyone could tell. Perhaps in that distant time they even knew a little more than we do, for some precious things have disappeared forever, and these are named “The Lost Arts.”

Well, anyway, in the King's oasis the little girls when they grew up became doctors, lawyers, merchants and chiefs, just as the boys did. They were (men and women alike) iron-molders, horse-breakers, hod-carriers, etc., in the humble walks of life, and judges, bishops, field-mmarshals, and so on, in the walks that are not humble.

In those days the women never talked about voting because they could vote whenever there was anything to vote about. Indeed, these people

seem to have progressed as far as they could and then stopped progressing. As far as we know life went along pleasantly, if a trifle monotonously, on the big oasis that the little sand waves were creeping over.

Now and again a learned man or woman would write a pamphlet telling how much sand was being slowly drifted in from the desert. But no one cared to hear, and the learned person always filed the pamphlet away, feeling that he (or she) was not appreciated. They invariably said that that was the way with prophets in their own country.

The land did not look any smaller, and it was a green and pleasant place where palm trees and date trees grew in groves between the king's city and the little towns. There were deep cool wells, and even a small lake near the center of the country; a lake like a blue mirror. Its waters flowed from some hidden source, and it was known as The Lake of Mystery.

Caravans always stopped at the outskirts of this oasis to buy and sell, and the people grew rich and contented—which is not good.

They liked to think that conditions would go on for their children, and their children's children this way forever. So the little creeping sand waves were banished as a conversational topic.

Now strangely enough in that place of wise folk,

the king himself was not a great scholar. He was a soldier, and often waged war upon his enemies, the wandering tribes of Bedouins. These would have despoiled his country and plundered his herds of camels and flocks of sheep. So he had need to be a soldier. But he was also a musician and played melodies that were all his own, upon a slender pipe of gold; and these melodies were so sweet they came to be whistled and sung by his people. Indeed we may even hear one now and again in these days, for music outlives most things.

Besides this, the King painted pictures of simple things on the smooth, gray stone wall of his palace garden. The colors he ground himself, and made them into small paint-cakes. They were such colors as are not made now, for ours do not last so long. We know this because once in a while there blows a great wind, and a bit of the palace garden wall tossed up and across the desert still shows us colors glowing and vivid as though brushed on yesterday.

And better than these things that amused the King's idle hours were his gentle deeds—for he was good to the poor.

Yes, the King painted pictures and played on his pipe, and looked to the happiness of his people and visited his flocks of sheep. But, with it all, between times he rode his Arab steed over the desert

at the head of his army,—as was the fine way in those days,—and he pursued his enemies relentlessly. Also he brought home the vanquished and turned them into slaves, which we cannot but regret.

These things he did.

As for studying books, not a book did he really study after he was fifteen, when the King his father had died and been embalmed, and he the prince came to the throne.

His highly instructed subjects just had to make the best of it, and congratulate themselves, that having surrounded him early with most learned masters, he had acquired some knowledge in his fifteen years.

Still among themselves they said he was a King with the tastes of a shepherd.

Particularly the women, who were Professors, and Lawyers and Politicians and Bishops, would have had him different. They claimed that he could not discuss subjects intelligently with them. The court jester maintained that they should have said, "His Majesty would not discuss subjects intelligently with them," and that, of course, is different.

It was generally agreed, though, that His Royal Highness would gain more popularity by taking an interest in important affairs, than by blowing on his pipe (which was, after all, no more than a shepherd's pipe made of gold) or by mixing his little

paint-cakes, whose colors turned out to last so long.

There was another characteristic of the King that was frowned on. He was superstitious.

He had been heard to admit that he believed in fairies, and he would not start a journey on Friday. While everyone knew what happened to the Court Majordomo when thirteen persons were permitted to seat themselves at the royal table.

But further, and most outrageous of all, His Majesty kept in his palace a crystal-gazer!

This man, who was a foreigner and weird to look upon, came from Heaven knew where, and he had gained a great power over the King by reason of telling him the past and future from the pictures that—so he averred—rose in his ball of crystal.

For the past—well, that was history and needed no telling; but queerly enough, what the strange man *foretold* often came to pass. This was beyond explanation, so, though the wise people condemned him among themselves as a charlatan and simple trickster, in secret they were overcome with more or less awe of him. As time went on the crystal-gazer became even less loved, but more feared. All would gladly have seen him banished from court, for his power over the young King grew to be dangerously great, and he and his magic ball were consulted on most affairs of state.

Now it was five years since the man had appeared upon the oasis. From which point of the compass, or by what manner he came none could say. He had appealed to no less a person than the King for patronage, and had found favor with His Majesty. Thereafter he was established at court as part of the royal suite.

The crystal-gazer was a picturesque fellow, neither old nor young. Always he was clothed in black, and his figure was tall and strong. From his shoulders hung a great black cloak of many folds, but its inner side was shot with silver and blue and scarlet threads so in the wind it flamed like a butterfly's wing.

His face was as a carved face, dark and unreadable, but his eyes were like deep pools that held a golden light. About his head was bound a scarlet turban, and in his ears were golden hoops, while from his waist-belt hung a short glittering scimitar. There were those who said that if the people had not outgrown such ignorant fancies, they would have feared he had the evil eye, for never had they seen so strange a light in human eyes before.

Only the children who met the man in his comings and goings did not fear him. He seemed to charm them in some silent way, for when he smiled they always followed after him until he gently waved them back, and then they would stand gaz-

ing wistfully down the road where he had gone.

At Court he could be vastly entertaining at the King's desire, and at times related marvelous tales of lands beyond the sand.

Still, he was tolerated rather than liked. But he went his way in unruffled quiet, and as long as he stood well with the King let the rest go.

Now, in that country occasionally a great wind blew in from the desert, and it lasted many hours. It was called the Simoon. Before it came the light turned red, and the air was hot and very still. When it came it carried fine grains of sand instead of rain-drops; sand that blinded the eyes and dried the throat.

Then the people went into their houses and shut fast the windows and doors. The streets were as deserted as in times of plague. The beasts looked for shelter, all but the camels, and they lay with their backs to the wind and their heads stretched out with closed eyes. The dogs sometimes went mad if the wind lasted long, and always they howled dismally when the red light came that foretold it.

One of these hot winds had been blowing now for two days. The people fretted in their closed rooms, and the King in his white palace ringed round with date palms and gardens, grew irritable and restless.

Often he insisted on having the palace windows opened for air, and then the sand blew in like a fine snow, sharp against the face, and they would have to be quickly closed again.

All attempts now on the part of the court attendants to divert or amuse His Majesty entirely failed. In a polite way he conveyed to them the fact that they bored him utterly.

The court dancers had danced, the court musicians had played, the court chess player had allowed himself to be checkmated several times by His Royal Highness, yet did not succeed in keeping him interested.

The little court-jester had seen the witticisms especially reserved for such wearying weather, received in abstracted silence. The lords and ladies taking their cue from the King, had not even smiled.

Then the jester, being young and hopeful, had recourse to tricks, and he had shaken his bells, turned catherine-wheels, and even rolled hoop-fashion round the great court drawing-room where they were all assembled.

But all his antics had been in vain; so now he was curled up under a big shadowy fern, a small red and yellow parti-colored person of doleful countenance.

From between the drooping fern leaves ne

watched the young King pacing up and down endlessly over the wide rug-strewn mosaic floor. One at a time the court attendants had seemed to melt away, until now, late in the afternoon, of them all only the crystal-gazer and himself remained—and he was hidden under the fern near an alcove hung with curtains. The crystal-gazer stood before his crystal ball. It rested in a golden cup on top of an ebony pedestal, and gleamed like a small globe of pure light.

The man had been looking down into it silently for a long time.

He did not appear to notice the King's restless walking, nor the soft withdrawal of the court folk.

More and more shadowy grew the beautiful room. No sound stirred in it but the King's footsteps and the puff-puff of sand against the colored windows. The air was heavy and sweet with the perfume of sandalwood and roses. Before the shrine of the god-of-storms that stood in the palace halls, the blue smoke of incense had been rising many hours, and this scent also drifted in.

Almost the little jester would have nodded to sleep if he had not been so interested in watching the two figures before him.

Presently the King paused in his pacing, swung around and spoke half angrily:

"What do you see in the crystal that you gaze at it so long, Faletto?"—for by this name they called the magician.

The dark man smiled. "I see nothing new, your Majesty. Faces rise in the glass and pass into mist again. Just faces."

"What faces?" demanded the King impatiently. "What faces? Known or unknown?"

"They are the faces of women," said the man. "Of court beauties, my lord—and wise women of the universities, and of titled and noble ladies. The well-known faces of those whom it has been suggested very forcibly by your councilors—so one hears—that you might regard with some interest, and with a view to choosing from amongst them a queen."

The King shrugged his shoulders. "The topic is one I am not fond of," he replied.

Then he walked restlessly again, and the other returned to his crystal.

All the light in the darkening room seemed concentrated in it.

Through the heated silence a bell struck the hour of sundown.

His Royal Highness stopped and spoke again. "What comes now in the glass, Faletto?" he questioned sharply.

"Still the faces rise and pass into the white mist, and rise again," was the answer. "Some are beautiful; some are coldly thoughtful; some are plain and peaceful, as knowing none of the fret that beauty brings its possessor; some are determined of mouth; some are crafty-eyed and close-lipped; some are cherub-faced, and colored as apple blossoms—yet, methinks, with a knowledge of life in their eyes."

The King threw out his hands. "Enough! Enough!" he cried. "Am I never to hear the end! I will have none of them! None of them! There is not a woman in our Kingdom who does not know more than the King. On every subject they can set me right, were it permitted. I feel it in every tone of their voices—in every glance. The most lovely have hidden their eyes behind glasses, for study has blurred their vision. They all have opinions on every subject—opinions set and hardened, and that no man could change. I have met all these women, Faletto, and I love them not. In their hearts they despise a King who plays on a shepherd's pipe, and takes an interest in his flocks, and paints simple pictures, and grinds colors. They despise me as one who lacks deep learning and takes too great joy in little things. Were I in constant warfare with our enemies, I might redeem

myself—but one cannot always fight. I will make none of these my queen, Faletto. They suit not my taste.”

Behind the fern fronds the little jester laughed, but made no sound. He drew back further under the green. The short twilight came, and the palace lamp-lighter entered and touched the candles in their wall cressets, and the tall lamps into flame. When the room was flooded with a yellow radiance he went out softly.

Again the King walked back and forth, and the sand beat on the windows.

Then the crystal-gazer spoke again, and his voice, calm and mellow, was as that of one uninfluenced by the heat or the storm.

“The faces have gone, your Majesty,” he said.

“What do you see now?” the King asked eagerly.

“In the crystal there has grown a great opal,” the man replied dreamily. “A hand holds the opal—a King’s hand, for on one finger is a ring with the Royal Coat-of-Arms cut into a ruby.”

“Yes? Yes?” the King questioned.

“The opal is oblong,” the crystal-gazer continued, “and tinted with every color known to this world. On one side there shows a small black cross. It is as though the stone had been struck there twice; down and over.”

“The opal is mine!” exclaimed the King. “I



The King stepped closer to the ebony pedestal.

own just such a jewel. It is in a casket locked in the wall yonder. An oblong opal of rare beauty, though a strange black cross upon it has lessened its value. I can show you the very stone!"

"Wait!" commanded the magician. Bending his scarlet turbaned head lower, he gazed down steadily. "The opal is still within the crystal," he said, "but the hand is gone. The stone seems larger, or nearer. Now—now from the imprisoned fire in the heart of the jewel rises a face—a woman's face! Now I see the throat, white and round as a pearl—now the shoulders—now the whole lovely body. She is clothed in a silvery gown that folds like mist about her. Her hair falls in golden waves to her waist. Her eyes are the color of the sea when the sun is on it, and she weeps—but their beauty is not dimmed."

The King stepped closer to the ebony pedestal.

"Her tears fall steadily," continued the crystal-gazer. "They are caught into the colors of the opal. But her face does not change. It is lovely beyond words. Now she fades—she passes—"

The King suddenly laid his hand on the man's shoulder with a hard grip.

"You are weaving a strange story, Faletto!" he exclaimed. "I will myself look into the crystal."

"Your Majesty will see nothing," returned the other with his dark smile. "It is only I who have

power over the ball, as you know. So far I read no story. But if you desire I will look longer."

"Look!" ordered the King, "but look to some purpose. I am in no mood for unread riddles."

Once more the man bent his eyes downward. Nothing stirred the stillness but the sand against the windows and their own soft breathing.

"Again the white mist in the crystal," said the magician monotonously. "Again a rising form. No, no, many forms. I see a throne; it is a throne, I think, for it is made of ebony and silver. On it sits an old, old King. On his white head is a crown. In his hand he holds a great opal that covers the open palm. Before him—waving, no—now clear, I see the figure of a girl. Her robe is of silver tissue, as made of moonlight, materialized. Her hair is in golden waves, and upon her head is a little circle of jewels. And now, there rises beside her a man strong and dark as an Arab, and fierce to look upon. He is in glittering armor, and his eyes are cruel. Through the mist now comes another form—a man—one young and fair and strong also. His face is indistinct. But it grows clearer as I look. Ah! This man has your face, my Lord! Undeniably your face. Still he is not otherwise you. He seems to be a shepherd; just a shepherd from the low hills. His only garment is a tanned sheepskin, and he carries a crook.

From his waist belt dangles a leathern sling. His bare feet are sandaled. In his right hand he holds a little flute. By all these marks he is but a shepherd, your Majesty. Strange!—for his face might be yours.”

“What more, Faletto?” the King urged. “Is there more? Can you interpret aught?”

Beneath the fern the little jester held his breath to listen. Seldom had he been so well entertained. His bright eyes shone in the fern gloom and were fastened on the magician’s figure.

Now he spoke again.

“Besides those I have told you of, and who are yet clear to my vision, I behold a dark-cloaked man, perchance a court astrologer, or passing wizard. Ah! It is again most strange. This man hath my face, as the shepherd hath yours, your Majesty. Would your eyes could see as mine do! The picture remains unwavering and clear. Beyond the group I have described are some people of the court. I see their faces all turned toward the old King, the little princess, the man in armor, the shepherd and the magician—otherwise they are but a blur of color and silken garments. It is as though they watched a play. Yet, methinks ’tis not less than a play of *life*, something that hath already been enacted, or that is to come. Now—now the King leans down. He seems to command the princess

to depart with the armored man. At least his gestures might be so interpreted. She shakes her golden head, then throws out her arms as in protest or refusal. Again the old King commands more violently. Once more she refuses, and seems to implore. Her eyes are wide and frightened. The jeweled circlet slips from her hair to the floor unheeded. I see the man in armor lean forward as though to claim her. Now as he touches her, she turns and runs swiftly, straight to the shepherd, and he catches her to his heart. In truth, a goodly shepherd this, your Majesty, a very goodly shepherd," the magician ended, lifting his eyes.

"Lose not the thread of your story," the King broke in. "There is surely more to this!"

"As your Majesty says—there is more," he returned calmly, looking down again. "While I watch, the aged King rises and his face is to be feared. He throws his right hand violently outward and the great opal he was holding falls to the floor. The man in armor stands as one undecided what move to make, but his eyes flame with unspeakable rage. They are fixed upon the shepherd who still holds the little princess as though he would shield her from harm. The King steps down from the throne. He turns to the magician and seems to give some sharp command. Now, —now—the magician raises his black rod—such a

one as is in my possession, ebony, wound with a silver serpent." The man faltered and stopped.

"Leave not the story unfinished," cried the King softly. "Look steadily, Faletto! What now? What now?"

"The magician lifts the rod," the mellow voice went on. "He waves it towards the little princess. His lips seem to chant, but his eyes are sorrowful. Now he lightly strikes the great opal shining with a thousand lights at his feet. He strikes it in the form of a tiny cross, down—and over. There follows a red mist like a soft cloud. It blots out the figures. Now it fades, slowly, slowly. Again come the figures. Again the old King, the man in armor, the magician, the shepherd, the group of courtiers—"

"And the princess?" broke in the King eagerly. "The little princess, Faletto?"

There was a strange stillness in the room.

"I see no princess, your Majesty," replied the dark man, his eyes fixed on the crystal. "She has vanished. But I see the magician stoop and lift the great opal. Now he rises, holding it on the palm of his hand. It is of heavenly beauty. The colors of the sunset and the dawn are in it and the silver-shot blue of the midnight sky. It is the wonder-jewel of the whole world! He passes it to the aged King, and together they gaze at it. I

see it clearly. Now, something wavers in the rose-colored heart of the stone. I see rising slowly a woman's face! Now the white round throat; now the beautiful body clothed in a gown of shining tissue. It is the little princess, my lord, and she weeps ceaselessly. I see her tears. The shepherd has hidden his face on his arm. He passes away. The armored man turns—is gone. The magician fades from the picture, with the wavering group of courtiers. All are gone except the King with the opal gleaming on the palm of his withered hand, and the princess, small as a fairy, imprisoned within it. He sits and stares into the jewel, and his wrath having accomplished this evil, burns out, and is as ashes in his soul. Now he lifts himself up tremblingly, and calls!—I see the magician return. He stands before the King and they speak. The King, I think, is repentant, and implores the magician to undo his work—to release the princess. The other seems to refuse, albeit regretfully, as not able to obey. He raises the ebony rod, and his lips move as though they said, 'But once!—I have power over it but once!'

The quiet voice dropped, and the crystal-gazer lifted his eyes from the glass.

"See you nothing more?" the King demanded, touching his arm. "Nothing more, Faletto?"

"Nothing," he answered. "The figures faded.

For a second the King's hand holding the opal remained vividly outlined, then it also passed. The opal alone floated before my eyes in the crystal, while imprisoned within it I still saw the little princess, and her tears were falling. Then she also faded from view, and the great jewel dissolved as mist in the sun. The crystal is but clear white glass now. Look for yourself, O Most Mighty!"

"But I am powerless to see the visions!" the King returned. "It is idle to ask me to look within the ball."

"Even you are able to discern the mist that comes when the pictures appear," answered the other. "Now there is no mist. There is nothing."

The young King gave an impatient exclamation and looked into the shining globe. Looked long. "No," he agreed. "There is nothing, nothing. It is a strange story, Faletto, and stirs my heart."

"I pray your Majesty bring me the opal you spoke of," requested the crystal-gazer.

The King went to a panel in the wall, touched a carved wood flower, and a tiny door opened. From a recess he drew out a brass casket. This he unlocked, and carried to the magician. The casket held many precious stones, and shining among them was the great opal.

"The very jewel of my vision!" he cried. "The very jewel! Of the same radiance and shape, and

marked by the little black cross. Now, here he wonders that I fain would unravel."

"That you *must* unravel!" commanded the King slowly. Then he lifted the opal and touched it with his lips.

"Faletto!" he said, his voice trembling, "place the stone upon your hand and look deeply into its colors. Tell me what you see."

"I have no power over aught but my crystal," the other replied, "but as you command, I obey."

He held out his dark hand, and the King laid the stone upon it.

Again silence filled the yellow-lighted room. The jester drew closer to the figures, though he kept in the shadows.

Minutes went by. Then the crystal-gazer spoke.

"Within the opal I see the imprisoned princess," he said. "She is lovely beyond my dreams of beauty. But she weeps. I see her tears, though she is fairy small."

The King caught the man's arm and swung him about.

"By my crown you will unravel this story for me by to-morrow night at this hour, Faletto!" he said in his imperious young voice. "You will unravel it willingly, or we will find a way to make you!"

So saying, he took the opal and locked it into the

brass casket, and he replaced it behind the panel, and locked also the flowered door.

"I dine with my ministers to-night, Faletto, but to-morrow at this hour meet me here. Then we will expect a full solution of what you have seen in the crystal, and what we have heard."

"O King, live forever!" the crystal-gazer returned gently. "It shall be as you desire, or I will pay forfeit with my life."

The young King smiled coldly, then with a little careless backward nod as dismissing the subject, strode from the room.

Softly the jester stole back beneath the drooping fern, and he shook from head to foot.

The tall dark-cloaked figure stood as he had when the King left him, and listened until the last sound of the royal foot-steps died.

Far away in the palace he knew the courtiers would soon gather into the banquet hall. This part of the palace might be deserted for hours. Softly he turned and there was a smile on his lips. He walked over to the great fern and thrust his hand beneath the green. Then he took a firm hold upon the little jester and brought him out into the light. "Sometimes evil befalls listeners," he said in his strangely sweet voice. "This time good is to befall one. You have heard my crystal-reading, Bijou, to the last word,—have you not?"

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The jester's knees shook under him. Lying, he felt—even the polite lies that were court coinage—would not now pass current. "I have heard, O Great One," he admitted.

"Then listen further," commanded the dark man. "You are as an open book to me, Bijou. I read your thoughts, so it would be best you stayed with the truth. Now hark you! In the forest beyond the lake is an old woman who is a lace-maker, and poor, yet not so poor but that she has a few sheep on the green beyond. Is this not so?"

"Of a verity 'tis so," Bijou answered shakily.

"This ancient dame is your Grandmother? Answer me?"

"O Mighty One, you speak with knowledge," he returned.

"With this ancient dame," continued the magician, "has lived these five years, a little maid most fair to look upon, who is your sister. Is it not as I say?"

"It is so, O Greatness!" the jester replied, in wonder.

"Is she good as she is beautiful?" asked the other. "Beshrew me if you parry this question or answer it not truthfully, much trouble will befall you."

A flashing smile lit up the little jester's face. "Her goodness far exceeds her beauty, my Lord!" he exclaimed. "To every living thing she is ten-

der. She careth for my grand-dame, and she tends the few sheep on the green. But she knoweth not much," he ended ruefully. "She readeth books, 'tis true, but they be not weighty tomes of serious things. She is too merry, methinks, to scan the philosophies to much purpose, and of the sciences she is vastly uninformed. For accomplishments she hath but the art of making lace and a gift of deftness in playing a lute."

"She hath enough," said the crystal-gazer. "What you tell me is even what I thought, for I have watched her often. Now, hark you again. To-night the sand storm ends, and the moon comes out full at midnight. At that hour you are to go with me to the dame's hut in the palm forest. There you are to bring your sister to me beneath the trees, taking care none know of our adventure. Art ready to obey?"

"Thou wilt do her no harm?" the jester questioned suddenly.

"On the contrary, I will bring her joy," the man answered with the smile that charmed the children into following him. "Believe this, and all will be well, Bijou. So, meet me at the stroke of midnight by the gate that opens out of the painted garden wall. Lift your hand in promise."

The little jester lifted a trembling hand and gave his word. Then they parted.

At midnight the crystal-gazer wrapped in his cloak, and the jester with him, slipped into the shadows beyond the palace garden, and journeyed through the city streets and on into the open country. The moon floated like a great silver bubble in a clear sky, for the long sand storm was over.

Their feet made no sound as they went, for sand softened every path, and it would be days before it was all brushed away.

By and by the palm woods loomed before them, and the little jester led the way to the old dame's hut. It was so humble a place, so vine-covered, one might easily have passed it by.

Under the shadows of some palmetto trees the crystal-gazer stopped.

"Here I will wait, Bijou," he said. "Bring your sister to me; and if you would escape trouble, waken not your grand-dame."

The jester left to do his bidding, and the man waited in the silver-edged darkness.

After a little while he saw two figures come out from the hut through the window at the side. They ran lightly toward him, hand in hand, and he stepped to meet them.

"Here she is, O Greatness!" cried the jester, "and make haste, I pray thee, to tell her your wish and let her away. My grand-dame is sharp of hearing and light of slumber."



He took her hand and bending down he kissed it in courtly fashion.

The little maid said nothing. Her eyes, fresh from sleep, were wide and starry. Her hair, loosened from its braids, was shaken about her as a cloak of gold. Her face was lovelier than there are words to say, and it was filled with wonder and unspoken questions. She wore a homespun gown of brown, and her little feet were bare and pearly white against the grass.

The crystal-gazer went close to her and took her hand. Bending down he kissed it in courtly fashion. Then he looked into her eyes.

"Little maid," he said, "I have watched you long. Now I read your heart. It is full of love to all things living. It is full of pity for all things hurt. It is full of joy and thankfulness for all things beautiful. Of such as you are the Kingdom of Heaven, and of such should be the Kingdoms of Earth." So saying he passed his hand lightly before her eyes. It fluttered as a bird might across their sight.

She wavered a little as though about to run, then stood quite still and smiled up into his eyes.

"Little maid," he said again, still moving his dark hands before her, "you are no longer the companion of the old lace-maker, your grand-dame; no longer the little maid of the palm-woods, who spins and bakes, and helps the shepherds when the lambs fall ill, or tends her sheep on the green. You are

a princess! A princess of rare beauty, who alas! has suffered long imprisonment. Do you not remember your father would have had you wed the fearsome warrior from the country of barbarians? But you loved a shepherd. You still love, but the shepherd has become a King! It is a King you love, little princess, and he adores you. But though he is a King, in his heart he is only a shepherd, and cares but for simple joys, as indeed do you. So you will be happy together. See! Here is your court-robe of silver tissue. When we reach the palace you will put it on." From beneath his cloak he drew out a shimmering gown, and shook it from its folds.

The girl gave a little ecstatic cry. "It is my court-robe!" she said. "I cannot remember when I wore it last, it seems so long ago—but verily it is mine!"

"It is yours indeed," he nodded. The little jester trembled as with an ague, but for utter fear made no sound.

"Now," said the crystal-gazer, "we will go to the palace. This time on foot, as we have no cavalcade. Here your attendant," pointing to the jester, "is but the King's fool, though he is a merry fellow who will be at your bidding, and be a good friend at court."

"I am her brother!" cried the jester. "O Greatness, let her not forget! I am her brother!"

The little maid touched him as though puzzled. "You are Bijou," she said, "and I love you, whether you are my brother or not—so what matter?"

"Be content," counseled the crystal-gazer. "Such wealth comes not to every man, little jester. And now, your Highness, take Bijou's sandals, and mind not their size. He will strap them on your feet. We go to the palace quickly."

Laughingly she let the pointed sandals be fastened, and then they all three hastened on and reached the palace gardens just before the dawn.

There the magician gave the little maid into the jester's care, and told him to screen her from all curious eyes.

"When the short twilight falls and the King's lamplighter makes his rounds of the palace, bring the princess to the alcove that is called mine, in the drawing-room. See the curtains be drawn. Here is the robe of cloth of silver. This the princess is to put on. Folded within it are silver sandals for her feet. Her hair is to be unbound as it is now. I trust you to reach the alcove at the twilight hour, by the hallway, and unseen. There wait."

He spoke only to the jester, for the little maid

seemed as one who walked in sleep, though her eyes shone, and her lips smiled.

Bijou alone seemed troubled. Not a merry quip remained with him. His eyes kept filling with tears, and his mouth drooped dejectedly.

"I would I were out of this coil, O Greatness!" he cried in sudden impulse. "Methinks you have some strange wizardry to play upon His Majesty. I like it not, and would not be party to it! I know not what you would do, or why you have brought my little sister thither. She is but an humble maiden, though perchance fair enough to gaze upon."

"Your people were not humble always, Bijou?" said the crystal-gazer questioningly.

"Nay—in truth that they were not!" he returned. "In the very long ago a grandfather of ours was King in some land beyond the sand—so says my ancient grand-dame. But his kingdom was overthrown, and none are left who know rightly when, or why. Because I am a juggler and can play some trickery of hand and foot, I have the luck to be court jester. Of my sister's life you know, and it is simple and obscure."

"Had things gone better with that distant grandfather of yours, Bijou, you might have been a prince, and your little sister a princess," said the dark man. "But fortune turns her wheel in many

ways. Look you now,—and take heed! What you have heard keep behind your lips. What you have seen repeat not. You overlistened and heard me read the crystal, so to-night you know the King has commanded me to interpret the story. He will again bring from its casket the great opal marked with the black cross, the opal wherein I told him I saw the imprisoned princess. What follows after sundown to-night you will see. Obey all my words—and now to your apartments!”

Swiftly the two young figures ran through the King's garden, and disappeared up a winding stair on the outside of the palace wall. The little maid looked back once at the magician, and smiled as in a dream. Then the jester drew her through a tiny door and it was closed.

The court folk had been notified that His Majesty desired no attendants that afternoon, nor would receive anyone in the drawing-room.

At twilight the King entered the room alone. His eyes were eager, but tired, as those of one lacking sleep. The crystal-gazer for once had read him a story that puzzled and tormented him as no story ever had before.

Hitherto there had always been a clew to the dark man's visions; some reason lay behind them. This one alone that so thrilled his heart, seemed made of mystery. A certain anger brooded in

him. Of one thing he was determined, the crystal-gazer should solve his story, bring some definite meaning out of it, or he and his ball of glass would be parted forever; the ball thrown into the deepest of wells, and the man himself banished from court; though not perhaps from the land, as he was still an interesting fellow, and so far, worth keeping.

In this mood, the King waited. He paced the rug-strewn floor as he had on the day before. The hour had struck, the hour fixed for the crystal-gazer to meet him. Yet the man did not come. The short twilight was upon them. The lamp-lighter entered and lit the candles in the wall cressets and the tall brass shaded lamps.

As he withdrew, the crystal-gazer parted the curtains of the alcove called his, and came into the room.

The heavy cloak swung about his figure, and he carried the crystal ball.

He bowed low to the King, then walked to the ebony pedestal and placed the ball in its golden cup.

The King's impatience died away, and a sense of calm and peace took its place.

"Are you ready to unravel your vision of yesterday, Faletto," he said, half-lightly—"or am I to be told it had no hidden meaning, and was but the

idle tale of an idle hour? Pause well before you speak. Methinks I will not take kindly to that excuse for its telling."

The dark man looked at him steadily, and the little compelling smile that was so rarely seen came to his lips.

"I bring no excuses, my Lord," he said.

"Then you have found the meaning of what your crystal showed?" exclaimed the King. "Now that is well! Much honor awaits you, Faletto, if you interpret it so it carries conviction to me also. But hasten! What comes first in this matter?"

"I crave your Majesty's indulgence," returned the man. "No new meaning has come to me concerning the pictures that rose yester eve in my crystal. I know not why the old King desired one who seemed to be a princess to depart with one who seemed to be a warrior. I know not why she refused—or why she fled to one who seemed to be a shepherd. I cannot tell what bitter curse imprisoned her in the opal—or by what power it was done. A vision is a vision—seen by the eye of the mind—whether there be a crystal before one or the clear air of heaven, or whether the eyes of the body be shut in sleep. Indeed 'tis then perchance we see clearest. I beseech you, be tolerant, if it is not possible for me to read the crystal's story as well as you desire."

The King gave a sharp exclamation. "You waive the question, Faletto!" he cried.

"I beg your Majesty's patience only because I think I can encompass enough to satisfy even you. I believe, if the princess be still imprisoned, as the vision seemed to make clear—I believe I possess the charm to free her. Yet, your Majesty, I hesitate. Were she set free, what would be her fate? It is a question of much moment."

The King stepped close to him.

"Faletto," he said softly, his eyes shining in his young face, "if indeed this is all as it was in the crystal, and you release the little princess, and give her joy in place of her tears, she shall be my queen. Since you told me of her I have thought of naught else. I am tormented for fear this be even less than a dream. That you have told me only of a flight of your wild fancy. I am possessed with but one wish—to behold the loveliness of the one whom fate so hardly imprisoned. In truth, and by my crown, this is my only wish."

The dark man stood immovably a moment; then he spoke, and in tones of command that rang across the room:

"Bring me the great opal!"

The King went to the flowered panel, took the jewel from its casket, and returned with it in his hand.

"Lay it at your feet, and fix your eyes upon it," said the crystal-gazer.

"Within the alcove is my ebony rod, wound with the silver serpent. This I have need of and will bring it." Turning, he entered the curtained alcove.

Upon the mosaic floor the opal burned with a thousand soft lights. It was as though the colors of all jewels were melted into it, and it held the hues of the humming-bird's throat and the peacock's crest. The pinks and crimsons of rose leaves had gone into its making, but its perfect beauty was marred by the black cross it bore.

The King fixed his eyes upon this cross, and wondered at it. So strange a mark it was upon such heavenly colors.

As he gazed down, truly it seemed to him he saw the fairy-small, imprisoned princess. Yet he was not sure. Faletto saw—then why not he, he questioned hotly. Lifting his eyes, he beheld the magician. The commanding figure stood before him, and the jewel shone at their feet.

The young King trembled a little, for never had he seen the crystal-gazer look as he did now. In his eyes the golden light sparkled as the sun on the sea, and his face was lit with happiness.

His right hand came through the folds of his cloak and held the ebony rod.

"Look not upon me," he said, "but upon the opal where the black marks have been implanted, for it is there I will strike!"

The young King obeyed. Then the magician's voice suddenly broke into a soft chant—

"Love is the Lord and the Master of Life,
From the beginning, and on to the end;
Love sweetens bitterness, Love cureth strife.
No joy is broken that Love cannot mend!"

Twice over the mellow song floated through the room. As the words died away the crystal-gazer swung his arm forward—the folds of his cloak rose and fell, and he struck the opal, shattering it into a thousand pieces.

The King raised his eyes with a short cry—and behold! the little princess stood before him—even the very little princess of the vision in the crystal!

Lightly the crystal-gazer passed his hand before her face as one who brushes away an invisible veil, and the look of sleep and dreams went from her eyes, giving place to one of bewilderment.

His Majesty turned to her, but as one who feared to speak, lest she vanish.

The princess gave a little soft laugh. "Have I been asleep?" she cried, "and was it in the rainbow?—Oh, I have been somewhere that was steeped in color! Where was it, Bellmore?" she questioned

the King. "Could I have been in the rose garden, or in a coral grove?" Then she held out her hands and ran to him merrily. "O Bellmore, how grand you are!" she said. "Where are the sheep? And does my father know you are here? You are like a Prince! A very Prince! Perhaps he has made you one to please me? Tell me quickly!"

The King caught her hands and raised them to his lips.

"O little princess—you have been lost and Falletto has found you," he answered. "Do not try and remember whether it was in the rose-garden or the rainbow, or a coral grove! My sheep are still out on the low hills, and sometimes you may come out there and be a shepherdess with me, and sometimes I can come home with you and play that I am King and you are Queen—for we will be together always—do you understand?—always!"

He took her hand and they went down the long room together, talking of what was, and had been, and what the days would be—and everything else they forgot.

The crystal-gazer watched them a moment, then parted the curtains of his alcove and entered. Close behind the curtains the little jester stood and quaked with fear.

The dark man beckoned to him to follow, and silently they passed out, down the deserted palace

hall and into the scented darkness of the King's garden.

The moon floated overhead like a great copy of the crystal-gazer's ball of glass. It silvered the edges of the palm leaves, and glinted on the night-moth's wings. It checkered the grass with velvet-black shadows.

Beneath a wide-leaved tree the man stopped. Then he turned and spoke.

"You have heard, and seen, and know. Silence is good, little jester."

The boy looked up at the majestic figure with angry eyes, and his fear departed.

"You are a trickster!" he cried hotly. "A thief also—one who has stolen my little sister from me—and you are a knave who has fooled the King!"

The dark man was silent a moment. Then he spoke again.

"Hard words break no bones," he said gently. "They strike, but leave no mark, little jester. Now listen, and forget a space your wrath. From a King you came—this you truthfully told—so it seemeth your sister is a princess. She had been long imprisoned, albeit you know it not. You say there is no honesty in me, yet, of a verity I say there be many imprisoned in this world who walk in seeming freedom. She also, the little princess, was hidden and held fast, though not in the heart

of an opal. Grant me forgiveness, little jester, for what you cannot understand and I may not unfold. Methinks Heaven has given me a dangerous gift, that of being able to cast a charm over those I meet, that makes them see, for a little, even as I would have them see, and believe—for a space—as I would have them believe. But over *you* I have cast *no* spell, though it would have been an easy task. You have said truly. I am a trickster, but it is even as the moon is a trickster, which makes beauty where no beauty was before, in waste and scarred places of the earth; and as the snow is a trickster, though of the snow you know nothing—the snow that overnight turns unsightly things into monuments of loveliness. The fairies and wood-elves that perchance only the King and princess alone in this wise land, believe in, weave happy spells over mortals—we are told—while the greatest trickster of them all is the Springtime, for she charms us into believing this old, old world is still young. But my time here is over. My work finished. To-night I go. At the moment of my departure I will lift the last remnant of the spell I have cast upon the King and princess from them. But one thing, O wise little jester, I cannot change or lift from their hearts, and that is the spell of Love. Your eyes clear and young must have seen it held them with its power. This will be enough

to make all things plain to them, and will plead my excuse."

Then, still smiling, and in his bewitching voice, he chanted as he had just before he struck the great opal:

"Love is the Lord and the Master of Life,
From the beginning, and on to the end;
Love sweetens bitterness, Love cureth strife.
No joy is broken that Love cannot mend!"

As the words drifted away the jester dropped to his knees, caught the hem of the man's cloak and lifted it to his lips.

"Ask not my forgiveness, O Great One!" he cried. "It is I who should ask forgiveness of thee! Only look on me as you do now and I will follow thee across the world!"

The man shook his head, but his eyes were misty, as though they held tears.

"Almost I believe you would, and this, little jester, without incantation or charm of any fashion. In truth my heart is warmed by this! Sometime we will meet again, but now I will not bid you follow me. Neither the stars nor my will point to that. Rather would I leave the princess in your keeping as well as the King. And now farewell!"

As the little jester gazed upward, wonder-eyed,

at the dark man, he saw the folds of his cloak rise like great and glistening wings, for the underside was woven of silver and blue and scarlet threads. The man's turban fell to the ground, and about his head his hair shone wavy and bright as copper, while his eyes were like the stars.

"Who are you?" the little jester cried, in trembling tones. "Who are you, O Greatness?"

"I am one who comes from afar to find lost lovers—and friends who pass each other in the dark, not knowing. Perchance it is from a fairy country I come or some happy place where fewer mistakes are made than in this world—that is called there 'The Star of Tears.' I am a mender of hearts; a giver of joy; an opener of locks and fast-closed doors. I am guardian of kings, as well as of little maids who are not overwise in this earth's wisdom. By many ways I come, and in many garbs. I lead true lovers until they meet, whether it be by rosy paths or along rough and lonely country. When they do not heed me they miss their way and then I am sorrowful. But to-night, little jester, I am very joyful!"

The little jester listened, breathlessly. Suddenly he stretched out his hands, for the face above him looked down with the smile the children used to follow.

"Go not without me, O Greatness! Go not with-

out me!" he cried, and tears blurred his sight. When he saw clearly again the garden was empty. At least only he in his fool's cap and bells, and his pied red and yellow, stood beneath the shadowy tree. Overhead the moon still floated round and clear as a great ball of crystal. So quiet it was that he fancied he heard far off the soft closing of the gate in the wall—but of this he could not be sure. He picked up the silken turban from the ground. Holding it fast, he shook his head a little till the bells on his cap jingled.

"If you had been a fairy," he said, "I think you would have grown small, and passed away under the leaves; and if you had been a spirit, you would have left me when my eyes were clear, and you would have flashed upward into the sky, as is the way, methinks, of spirits. But this," and he raised the scarlet turban to his lips, "this was worn by a *man*. I am content, O Greatness, for now I will watch until you come again."

And then, because the garden was so sweet-scented and cool, and the moon was good company, and he was very tired and a little lonely, the jester curled up under the shadowy tree and went to sleep.

THE END

The Golden
Apple Tree

